

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1885.

THE MYSTERY OF ALLAN GRALE.

BY ISABELLA FYVIE MAYO.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE DEAD LIVING.

IN the Hotel at Ragan, at the door of the chamber which had just been opened to him, stood Edgar Vivian, pale and terror-stricken. It was no ghost's face that confronted him, though it looked worn and ghastly as one; but it was the face of a man whom Edgar had believed to be dead—the face of Allan Grale.

Young Vivian staggered back. "Oh, Allan, how can this be?" he cried. "They found your body, as was thought, in the Dark Pool; they mourn you as dead. I have been silently, I may almost say openly, accused of killing you!"

"Come in," said Allan, in deep, hollow tones. "Come in and sit down."

That was all his greeting. He drew his old friend into the room, pushed a chair towards him, and stood in gloomy silence, gazing at his unexpected guest.

"Allan," repeated Edgar, "how could you do this?"

"What is it that I have done?" demanded Allan Grale. "I know nothing. I have closed my ears to all possible news from Dering since I left it."

"Yet you bade me send on your box to Corrabuin!"

"I scarcely knew what I did or said," replied Allan. "But I thought it might spare you some trouble to get rid of that box. I have never called for it. I suppose it is there still."

"No," said Edgar. "Your father somehow got word of it—not through me; and it is in his possession."

Allan Grale made a sudden movement of his hand towards his head, as one stricken. "Do you know now what was in that box?" he enquired.

"No."

"Does Maria?"

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"Maria never even knew I had it, until that fact was brought out at the inquest over what was supposed to be your body," said Edgar, simply. "After that, she knew what I knew—little enough."

"Of course Maria has told you now what she knows!"

"Maria has told me literally nothing," declared Edgar. "She wanted very much to see you herself, and it was by her wish I made that appointment with you at the Black Pool. She was to be there with me, Allan. Of course you had the note, making the appointment?"

"Aye, but I did not keep the appointment, Edgar, because I kept an earlier one at the Black Pool; an appointment for the very afternoon when you left your note. And out of that appointment there grew another, to be held at the same place on the same night, which ended everything."

Edgar gazed in dismay. The speaker had sprung from his chair and was pacing the room like a wild man.

"And so they found my body, did they!" cried he in a terrible whisper. "I wonder how it was Maria never saw that?"

Edgar kept silence. The shock had almost stunned him. He found Allan Grale where he had expected to find a Mr. Smith. It must have been Allan who had married Morna!

Allan spoke again, with a strangely chilling apathy. "I wrought evil and misery everywhere," he said, "by trying to hide my misdoings, to conceal the fact that I was a thief and a forger. But at least I can be candid now. I am also a murderer, Edgar—a murderer!"

There ensued an awful silence.

"Don't you hear, Edgar? Why do you stay in the room with me? You will find some men below, and stout cords to bind me. Go, and bring them."

Surely his mind is giving way, thought young Vivian.

"Nay," Allan went on, as if divining his thoughts. "I have already concealed my crime so long that it has cost another life! Why would Morna, in her divine pity, love me and marry me? I told her she had better not; I told her I had had a past life of storm and sin; but I did not tell her the truth of my blood-guiltiness. And when she was my wife, and, despite my silence, her pure soul received the image of the scene at the Black Pool, which ever haunted her husband's mind, and her innocent lips murmured the agony of remorse which he stifled within him, they called her—mad!"

"Why, Grale—Allan, what are you talking about?" exclaimed Edgar, pulling his wits together with a strong effort. "As you have heard nothing from Dering since you left it, what do you know about the mystery of the Black Pool, and the dead body which everyone said was yours?"

The unhappy man looked at him with those strange, wild eyes. "Did you know I had a cousin?" he asked. "You may have heard my mother speak of her sister, Mrs. Gibson, and your brother George

saw her when he went with me to my aunt's house—the school-house at Savoch. George said something to me afterwards which made me wonder whether Aunt Gibson had let out anything to him about her son. George seemed to know there was something wrong at Savoch. So you never heard of Aunt Marget's son, Abel Gibson?"

"No," said Edgar, quietly. "What about him?"

Allan was again walking fiercely to and fro. "Abel Gibson was my evil genius: that is all. And how can I even say that in my own excuse now—now that he is dead—dead by my hand? You tell me that a dead body has been found in the Black Pool; then it is the body of my cousin, Abel Gibson."

"Let me hear all," said Edgar, laying his compassionate hand upon the trembling arm.

"Yes, he has been my evil genius," went on Allan. "I may say as much to you—to Maria's brother—if to no one else. To begin with, he preyed upon my boyish sympathies; he was a year or so older than I, and that, in youth, makes a difference. He was also bigger, more advanced, more masterful; anyway, I loved him. Later, when we were young men, he came to me in trouble—outcast, outlawed. Reprobate, too, but that I suspected not. Naturally, with the impulsive instinct of youth, I sided with the young against the old. I heard him utter vows, and saw him shed tears of sentimental repentance—maudlin repentance I should call it now. By his specious wiles, which I detected not, he drew me utterly into his toils. And while he was opening up for me his own evil ways, which for me he caused to wear a most attractive glamour,—his betting, his gambling, his riotous living, I—well, I fell unconsciously, step by step, into them. Soon I was not one whit better than he, except in hypocrisy, though I was still rich and respected, while he was shunned and forgotten. We were speedily in difficulties together—difficulties which Abel looked to me to make straight, but which the means at my command were quite inadequate to meet. We had recourse to money-lenders and such helpers, with results, Edgar, of which even you have some experience."

"Is this what Maria knew?" asked Edgar.

"Ah!" said Allan, as if stung, "she knew more than that! About last Christmas twelvemonth, nearly two years ago now, when we were in terrible straits, in an evil hour I chanced to go into my mother's bedroom, and saw her jewel-case open on the table. She had been putting up her diamond cross, which she had worn on Christmas Day, and was called away to see some visitor in haste, whom my father had brought in. While I waited, for I wanted to speak to her, I looked into the case, meaning no harm. I opened one of the little boxes; there lay the beautiful diamond cross, worth, I knew, some hundreds of pounds. The devil was at my elbow, Edgar. He put into my mind the thought that it was only a toy, which she scarcely ever used; she might not wear it again until next

Christmas Day ; and if I took it, and pledged it, I could soon get it back again. I took that cross ! ”

Edgar could say nothing. But he went nearer to Allan, and stood beside him. It was his dumb declaration of sympathy ; of pity and succour.

“ I slipped the cross into my waistcoat pocket, leaving the box it had lain in and the case just as it was, and I was leaving the room when my mother came up the stairs. She saw me in the corridor, and thought I had just turned out of my own chamber, never thinking I had been in hers. She passed into her room talking to me, and I stood at the door looking in. ‘ Mr. Gladson, of Liverpool, is downstairs with your father, Alny,’ she said—I recollect the words to this day. ‘ Oh, is he,’ I carelessly answered ; and while I spoke I saw her lock her jewel-case without examining it, and put it into the safe place where she kept it. Ah ! Poor mother ! ”

The groan went to Edgar Vivian’s heart.

“ Abel Gibson pawned the cross ; and from that day my doom was sealed. He never let me have a happy moment afterwards. He had obtained a hold over me, and did not scruple to use it. Maria — ”

“ Was it *this* that Maria knew ? ” interrupted Edgar. “ But how could she know it ? ”

“ By the Fate which decrees that hidden things shall be made manifest,” answered Allan, wildly. “ Abel sent me the ticket when he had pledged it, and I kept it by me. I did not get up the money to redeem it as quickly as I had hoped, but it was ready at last. On the very day when I was about to send the ticket back to Abel—just as I believed I had got all my wrong-doing set straight, and had made a firm resolve to be wiser—it ended in my handing to Maria the envelope which contained the ticket and a few compromising words, instead of a little note I had written to her. I had misdirected the envelopes, you see. I remember your sister’s happy face as I slipped the note into her hand. It was at a garden party at the Court. She was standing under the cedar tree, for summer was then setting in. I remember the very ivy leaves she wore at her throat, —and I never saw Maria’s face happy again. She sent me back the note and the ticket next day, folded in a sheet of paper on which she had written ‘ The way of transgressors is hard.’ Of course she understood it all. That was what divided us, Edgar.”

“ She did not understand about the—the bills and the forgeries ? ” spoke Edgar, in a low tone.

“ She suspected. As soon as she heard about them, instinct told her it must be my work.—The way of transgressors is indeed hard,” continued Allan. “ Before I could get the cross redeemed I found that the money provided for it was used for something else. Abel Gibson, always in new troubles of his own, came to me with a confession that he had been obliged to apply it to purposes of his own.

Troubles thickened, Edgar. Goaded on by him, not knowing which way to turn, I at length listened to his insidious promptings, and *created* money by using my father's name. It was to benefit him, not me; I declare that; though indeed I had been obliged to make his obligations mine. He it was who did all the active part of the fraud: put the bills in circulation, presented the cheques, and ——”

“Allan, I should have told the truth to my father!”

“I wish I had. I have wished it a hundred times. But I hoped to put things right myself. I got the cross back in my possession, but when George and I were starting on our trip to Scotland, I had not found the opportunity of replacing it in my mother's jewel-case. It seemed impossible to get at her keys. So I stored it away in that oriental box for safety, in which were already hidden other dangerous things—papers that would prove me to be the guilty man in regard to the forgeries.”

“How came you to use the name ‘Mark Bedell,’ in those forgeries, throwing the suspicion on Charles Carr?” asked Edgar, in a low tone.

“I never did,” said Allan, vehemently. “That is, I never did it consciously. How it came about, I cannot tell with certainty. When I was drawing out the first false bill, the name, ‘Mark Bedell,’ came into my head—just as Charles Carr said afterwards, the name, as a hero for his story, came into his. I did not know that anything suggested it to me. I did not remember any association with it. Later, when it appeared that the names were identical, I could only think that I must have seen the name on some paper in Charles's desk, perhaps in the manuscript itself; but I declare that I was, and am, utterly unconscious of it. It may even be that I, in some moment of carelessness, left the name in my desk, and that Charles saw it, and unconsciously took it up. I cannot tell how it was. When my father was instituting a search to discover the perpetrator of the forgeries, and spoke of calling in the aid of a detective, I grew afraid the oriental box might have to be visited amidst other things if the search extended to our house; and I asked you to take charge of it. The papers I have mentioned were in the box, as well as the diamond cross.”

“I must ask you a question, Allan, for myself,” said Edgar, speaking impulsively. “When I told your father—as I had to tell—that you had kindly lent me fifty pounds, he said I had written a note requesting a loan of a second fifty: how was that?”

“Ah,” groaned Allan, “I was fast in the toils then. I had had news from my cousin Abel that he was again on his way to Dering; that money he must have, and that he could make no move for himself, as he found detectives were zealously pursuing inquiries relative to the Mark Bedell frauds. My father, I suppose, had then put the detectives in motion. Fifty pounds Abel said he must have, and without loss of time. I had not got it; and I wrote

that note, Edgar, imitating your hand-writing, which I could do well. But it did not answer; my father refused the loan, and I had to go to meet Abel without the money. We met at the place he had appointed—the woods near the Dark Pool. It was the afternoon that you called at Moorland House, and left that note in pencil for me. I took with me a parcel for Charles Carr, which I meant to leave at Dr. Palmer's, to account for how I had spent my afternoon, if any chance question were asked at dinner-time."

Edgar Vivian was listening breathlessly.

"I found Abel different from what I had ever seen him before. I think he felt himself a desperate man, taking his last throw in life. He told me that he believed our detection was close at hand; that he felt almost sure the detectives had traced a connection between us, and that, for his part, if I failed to secure him the means of escape, he should declare the truth. I saw Abel in his true light that afternoon, and I felt myself completely at his mercy. He told me, in a sort of insolent boast, that he had stolen General Vivian's spade guinea. It seems that he had come to Dering unexpectedly, the afternoon of the General's fall, hoping to get to see me, and passed the General when he was lying in the road. Bending down to raise him, he caught sight of the spade guinea attached to the watch-chain, and the impulse to take it overpowered him: it meant money. He could not do anything, he found, to restore the General to consciousness, and went out of Dering the way he had come, without seeing me, first telling a boy he met to run for assistance for the fallen man. That guinea he pledged at once, Edgar, at the shop on the Carstow Road. I cannot tell you how I felt when he told me this shameful thing. Forging was bad enough; but to rob an unconscious, perhaps a dying man, was horrible. I had a little loose cash in my pocket, and I gave it him, bidding him go at once and redeem the guinea, and I promised to meet him at the Black Pool in the evening, and to bring some money with me to enable him to get away, if I could by any means procure it. I had thought, you see, that perhaps I might get it from my mother. However, I was frustrated in that, for she and Mary Anne had gone to Lady Laura Bond's, and stayed there."

"Did you leave the parcel with Charles Carr?"

"No. I had not time. I slipped it into my pocket and took it home with me. I dined alone. Directly afterwards I went out again to meet Abel at the Black Pool, as arranged. The hour named was eight, and he kept me waiting there till ten. I dared not leave the spot lest, if he came just too late, he might at once carry out all the threats he had hurled at me. I feared, too, lest his delay might be involuntarily due to his arrest! Presently I began to marvel what reception I might get from my father if I went home and Abel's surmises were correct. Edgar, I had two hours of fever and delirium. Now I sat on the cold earth,—then I wandered to and

fro. I took Carr's parcel from my pocket, and mechanically stripped away its wrappings, just because I could not keep my fingers still. It contained the watchmaker's hammer, which I had borrowed from him."

"Ah!" exclaimed Edgar.

"When Abel came he was in a fearful temper. I think he had been drinking. A smart shower began to fall, and we went under the trees. He instantly demanded my light overcoat, which I was wearing, saying I had plenty of clothes to change when I got home, while he had none—neither home nor clothes. I let him have it, and he put it on. I felt half afraid of him. He took the spade guinea out of his pocket, tauntingly showed it to me, and said he should not give it up. I had to confess that I had brought no money, and I suppose that put the finishing touch to his temper, for he became like a madman, striking me a sharp blow in the face. We had a struggle; it put up my temper, and I think I was as mad as he. He wrested my stick from me and threw it behind me with a mocking laugh. I snatched the hammer from my pocket—and—and struck him with it, and then he lay motionless at my feet. And the fiend of wrath and hatred within me rose in blind strength, and I hurled him into the deep Black Pool. It was only when I heard the sullen splash of the waters that I seemed at all to know what I had done."

Allan stopped, and buried his face in his hands. Edgar sat as one dumb.

"I scarcely know how I felt—I scarcely know what I did," resumed Allan. "I remember I saw two hats lying on the ground where we had struggled, and I took up one and threw it also into the pool. I snatched up the other, and a walking-stick: his. How long I stayed there in the moonlight, not knowing what to do in the awful trouble, I cannot tell; then I went away, taking the Carstow Road."

"Dr. Palmer has always said he saw you on the road that night about twelve o'clock."

"Aye. I walked on and on without any aim, only wanting to get away, and at length I reached Sladford. There I stayed all day in concealment. I was utterly miserable; I thought I would destroy myself; and at night went into a chemist's shop to get some poison—and found that the young man in it, about to serve me, was Mark Acland. I don't think he knew me. He refused the poison, and I came away, leaving, by accident, my stick in the shop; but I would not go back for it. Then I thought of this place, Ragan; thought I would come off to it and hide myself here, instead of committing the deadly sin of taking my own life. I remembered how your brother George had once said Ragan would be just the spot to bury oneself in. And I started the next morning by train for Scotland, writing to

you, Edgar, when I got there, to send that box to Corrabuin. I sent the hammer back to its owner ——”

“Wait a moment,” said Edgar. “How could you travel if you had no money?”

“I procured some. I could not have travelled without it. You know Fordham, the lawyer, who lives at Sladford: everybody knows him. He had done a little business for me at times, and had always shown himself friendly. I went to him that same night, after thinking the matter over on leaving the chemist’s, and obtained an interview with him. I confided to him that I was in a small trouble (it was how I put it), and had to take a journey in connection with it; but that I had not the means, for I had not ventured to speak to my father; and I boldly asked him to lend me sixty pounds. He put some questions to me, which I answered as well as I was able, without giving any clue to the truth, and he then handed me the money—sixty pounds. I confess it was more than I had hoped for; I thought he might offer me the half of it; but I suppose he remembered my father’s wealth and that I was his only son. Pledging him to keep my visit secret, which he faithfully promised to do, I left him.”

“You were fortunate, Allan.”

“I was. What I should have done without it, I know not. With that sum in my pocket I journeyed North, came to this hotel, and straightway had a short, sharp illness. I made acquaintance with the McOrists—the people at the farm. None of them had seen me at my previous visit, except the nephew, Colin, and I don’t wonder that he did not know me again. Though he has said to me once or twice, ‘At times I seem to have seen your face and heard your voice before, as if it were in a dream.’”

“You married the daughter, Morna?”

“Alas, yes! Edgar, at times I feel more remorse to think that I married such a girl as Morna, and let the shadow of my crime steal from my soul to hers, than I do for the slaying of Abel Gibson! But—she loved me. And it was so strange and so sweet to feel myself loved, as Morna loved, in my desolation. And yet I never loved her—as I loved your sister Maria!”

There was a long silence. Then Allan suddenly asked, the question striking him, how Edgar came to be at Ragan.

“I have brought back my poor sister-in-law,” Edgar answered. “She chooses to live here in her widowhood.”

“Your sister-in-law?—Her widowhood?” echoed Allan, utterly perplexed.

For he knew nothing of the past. He had not any idea that the pretty young woman whom he had known at the farm as Mrs. Forester was George Vivian’s wife. He did not yet know that George was dead. So, just as he had recounted events to Edgar, Edgar in his turn had now to enlighten him. To hear of the death of George

affected Allan much. He buried his face in his hands, and when he looked up, his eyelashes were wet.

"And you had your own troubles, too, Edgar," he said in a kind tone; "your money difficulties."

"They have come right," said Edgar, with a flash of brightness. "Through an old college tutor, I had the chance of undertaking a heavy piece of literary compilation, and by working at it almost by night and day, I have set myself right with the world again. I used to shut myself up, denied admittance to all comers, scarcely ever went out, for the work had to be finished within a given time. People took up the notion, from this and my gloomy face—for, in truth, I was sad enough—that I was morbid and had committed all kinds of sins, if not crimes. So do our friends misjudge us!"

"You had no cause to shut yourself up," said Allan gloomily, "but I had. I am tired of it—of the anxiety, the remorse, the trouble—and now that Morna is gone I shall give myself up. I will go back to Dering with you, Edgar."

"Yes, I hope you will—but not to give yourself up. What end would it answer? and remember that your father and mother and Mary Anne are living. What would such a confession be for them? No, Allan, the mischief is bad enough as it is; you must not increase it."

The dead Morna was to find her last resting-place among generations of her forefathers, in the wild solitude of a burying-ground on an island of the mighty loch. In the parlour at Ragan prayer was offered up beside the dead, and a Gaelic psalm was sung. Not a woman was to be seen. But as they bore forth the body, a sudden melancholy "keening" testified that sundry ancient women, gathered about Mrs. McOrist in her retirement, kept up the mourning customs of their race.

They laid her coffin in the boat—the very boat with which she and her cousin had succoured George and Allan on the memorable night when they first saw Ragan. Her husband, her father, and her cousin Colin rowed it, and a place was found in it for Edgar Vivian—a Highland honour rendered to the stranger. Other mourners followed in other boats, and now from one, and now from another, the bagpipes sent up heart-piercing dirges. Edgar never forgot the scene. The day was glorious, as for a bridal. The lightest ripple stirred the face of the waters, and the shadows raced over the lower hills; massive Ben Schlioch lay back bathed in glory, and the quartz peaks of Ben Eay glistened in the sunlight; while the wild Gaelic music rose like the wail of aching human hearts in the midst of bright, placid nature. The soft shadows of the ancient trees on the little island seemed to offer a sympathising refuge from the garish sunshine on the loch. The dead silence at the grave painfully struck Edgar, accustomed to the sweet solace of the English burial

service. With uncovered heads, the friends and clansmen pressed round to take a last look into the open grave, and then the sods were turned in, and glengaries and hats were resumed.

Old Hector M'Orist laid his iron grasp on Edgar Vivian's yielding arm. The young Southern face, seen first in Ragan's darkest days, had won the stern old man by its profound sympathy with his own unspeakable woe. He led Edgar a little aside, and pointed down a bosky glade, where the sunbeams, only allowed to peep between tangled branches, glimmered on tall ferns and rich beds of mosses. He pointed to a dark green shadow, which looked little more than a deep hollow in the turf. But Edgar noticed that the aged tree beside it was hung with shreds of ribbon and scraps of cloth, and stuck full of coins.

"There," said Hector McOrist, "there is the well where the sick minds of our people were once restored to them again, sweet and sound. But it is dry now. It has dried up beneath the blaspheming mockery of the baser sort of stranger. It had no water for Morna. The ancient fountains of healing for our people are broken, and no new ones flow."

That was the father's one outbreak of feeling. He relaxed his hold on Edgar, turned abruptly away, and went among his neighbours, as austere and cold as if the heart within him were not broken.

And then the mourning procession returned to Ragan. Allan went at once to his hotel. Edgar spent the remainder of the day with the McOrists. The bereaved mother more than once expressed her satisfaction that Rosa had come back to them. She was much impressed by the discovery that it was Rosa's dead husband who had so strangely heard the unaccountable sound, which the elder McOrists now firmly believed had been the presage of Morna's approaching doom.

"But why did he hear it? And how did the end begin that day?" pondered the mourning mother. She remembered that the young Englishman had seemed to feel a foreboding lest the sign should have a sinister significance for him or his—and truly he had not been wrong! Had the token been sent to him—to him, a stranger—because his doom was to fall so close before that of the last daughter of the house?—and because her whom his heart had chosen was to come and sit—not in Morna's empty place, no, no!—but near it. But Janet McOrist found no answer to her second question, "How did the end begin that day?" She had never received a distinct impression of Allan Grale's arrival on that fateful night. Doubts and fears, lest some sudden attraction might spring up between Morna and George Vivian, the pleasant stranger, so singularly distinguished by the "Spirit" of the race, had led to the hasty breaking up of the circle round the hearth, and had prevented the old people from witnessing the tardy arrival of Allan. Had they seen him then, would they have known him again when he reappeared as

Mr. Smith? And if so, would they have been warned? It almost seemed as if the fears the "warning" had awakened, had themselves fulfilled the warning. Edgar said farewell to the family that night. Rose came out with him to the lonely road, and walked by his side a little way under the cold light of the stars.

"Don't be unhappy about me," she said. "Don't let a thought of me ever over-shadow you. I shall have peaceful days—peaceful days and useful work—and perhaps these good people will let me comfort them a little for Morna's loss. It will be such a life as I might have lived at home—only it is colder here—and the beauty is so grand and far, instead of near and winning! Good bye, Mr. Edgar Vivian."

They shook hands, and parted where the Ragan cart-way entered the high road. Rosa went back in the darkness, weeping bitterly—Edgar hastened forward through the haunted silence.

Meanwhile, though Edgar Vivian knew it not, he was being cleared of all suspicion in the eyes of Dering. Old Mittens' new housekeeper had found the missing letter among the "scraps;" it was in two or three pieces, but when joined together they presented the letter which Allan Grale had written, requesting Edgar to send the box to Corrabuin. When Edgar Vivian had met the cart that morning as he was going to the station with Rose, old Mittens was bearing the letter into Dering in triumph, to hand it over to those whom it might concern. Also there had come forward a gentleman, one Mr. Chard, who on the night of the fatal encounter had been passing near the Black Pool and saw two people quarrelling on its banks. The one was Allan Grale; the other was a stranger whom he had never before seen, certainly not Edgar Vivian, (whom he, Mr. Chard, knew well), or bearing the slightest resemblance to him. Mr. Chard being acquainted with Allan, hastened his steps onward, not liking to intrude on other people's private business, and never supposing that the quarrel would go on to blows. Mr. Chard was on his way to the station to catch the midnight train, en route to Southampton, whence he took steamer the next day for the West Indies. He had only now returned to England and to Dering, and become acquainted, for the first time, with what had taken place—upon which he hastened to declare his testimony. Which had the effect of putting the finishing touch upon the complete exoneration of Edgar.

CHAPTER XLV.

"A LIFE FOR A LIFE."

ALLAN GRALE duly started with Edgar Vivian on his dismal journey to the South. They left the Glen in the early morning, the two alone travelling to the railway station in a chaise, which Edgar drove. They would have to go over precisely the same route which Allan had taken

with George Vivian the preceding year. What sad changes had taken place since that time! Then George Vivian had been full of health and hope, full of high promise and fair prospects; and Allan, though he had his secret anxieties and troubles, never feared but that he should surmount them.

"Oh!" moaned Allan to his own heart, as he sat with his head back against the well-padded carriage, and his hands before his face, "if I could but bring Abel Gibson back to life, and to the possibilities of amendment!" But that was not to be.

"Edgar," he said suddenly, as they were reseating themselves in the train after a half-hour's sojourn in the beautiful northern city which he had once said was chiefly famous to cockney travellers as "a halting-place for a mail and a meal," "with your leave, we will determine to go where George and I went by accident the last time we travelled this way. We will go to Savoch school-house, where live Abel Gibson's father and his mother, my own mother's only sister."

Edgar paused in doubt before he answered. "It will be too terrible an ordeal for you, Allan."

"I must give myself up to the old man, first of all," said Allan, in despairing tones. "I must tell him the whole truth freely, face to face, we two together. If he does not give me up to the grasp of the Law, I shall give myself up to it at Dering."

"There will be two words to that," thought Edgar. "Abel's mother will be there," he said aloud. "Remember that."

A spasm passed over Allan's face. "I do not forget it," he said. "God help her! Perhaps she need not hear my confession—but there! I am still thinking of myself rather than of her. But I must go and I will!"

When Savoch was reached, they did not find it, as on Allan's previous visit, bathed in a sweet sunshine, which made the most of its sparse attractions. This day was gray and gloomy, with a bitter sandy edge on the wintry air. As they turned a corner and came in sight of the schoolmaster's little house, standing bald and square opposite the bold square school-house, Allan uttered a low, pained cry.

There at the gateway, set in the low stone wall that surrounded the master's house, stood the same gaunt figure which had greeted the eyes of George Vivian, and which had struck him as giving singularly appropriate human interest to the dreary place. Perhaps the round shoulders were a little rounder—perhaps the uncovered grey hair was a little greyer. But that was all. The attitude was the same. The watching face turned in the same direction—towards them as they came along.

"It is my uncle!" groaned Allan. "He waits so every day. He is watching for Abel! He thinks that some day he will come home—and that the afternoon train is the one most likely to bring him." But as he spoke, it occurred to Edgar, as it did not seem to occur to Allan, that surely the Gibsons must have heard of the Dering mystery;

and that their nephew's visit would come upon them as a visit from the dead. Edgar scarcely knew how they introduced themselves; how they got through the greetings. But Mr. Gibson did not seem startled at their appearance. He gave them no warmer welcome than before, but he recognised Allan more quickly this time, and he mistook Edgar for George, not because there was much likeness between the living brother and the dead, but because it was not easy for Mr. Gibson to imagine changes, and it seemed most natural to infer that Allan would have the same companion. Again he led the way into the little parlour, grown just a shade shabbier and drearier. Again he summoned "Marget" from some upper chamber, and again "Marget" came, breathless and tremulous. Edgar found it hard to believe that the little, faded, worn-out woman could be "own sister" to that portly matron, Mrs. Gale.

Then followed a little desultory conversation, from which Edgar gathered that there had been very little communication between Savoch and Moorland House of late. Years ago, the intimacy between the two sisters' households had been partly suspended by the Gibsons' shame and sorrow concerning their son Abel. Mrs. Gale had been equally reluctant to write when sorrow fell upon her through Allan. She had said but little about his disappearance, putting it as "absence," and she had not yet brought herself to write of the dreadful discovery connected with the Dark Pool.

"Uncle," spoke Allan, in a pause of the conversation, "I should like to speak a few words with you alone."

A grey pallor swept over the minister's iron features, and he drew a hard breath. His wife's worn face, on the contrary, brightened with a strange, eager brightness. Something was coming! And something—anything—was better than the terrible suspense and unnatural silence of years.

"Marget," said the schoolmaster, "perhaps you will take the other young gentleman out and show him the church, and the little we have to show. Bid the lassie put tea in readiness for your return, and do not tarry long."

When they had gone out, closing the door behind them, Mr. Gibson turned to Allan and spoke with livid lips:

"Abel is dead."

Allan bowed his head. He could not remember afterwards with how many words, or how few, he told the whole dreadful story. He could never understand how far Mr. Gibson realised the whole facts of the case—that Allan himself had been accounted dead, and that his own son's body had been identified and buried as his. But one thing he managed to make quite plain, and that sufficed—that Abel Gibson was dead, and that he, the old man's only son, had met his death at the hand of himself, Allan Gale. He tried to hint, gently and considerately, in a short sentence, what his life from Abel and his provocation had been.

The old man buried his face in his hands. But he did not weep. He only felt that he would never have to stand and watch at the gate again: he only knew, for the first time, how much hope there had been in his daily waitings there!

"I have come to give myself up to you," said Allan, "that you may give me in charge to answer for this."

The stricken father stood up, that grey pallor still overspreading his features.

"I cannot do it!" he said. "Poor wretch! I will not do it!"

"Oh, uncle, you have a right to do so. Does not the highest law say, 'A life for a life?' Why do you not curse me?"

A strange light illumined the minister's naturally stern face. It was like the first sunbeam of spring struggling through the dim clouds of a long winter.

"My curse shall be forgiveness," he cried, unconsciously quoting the words of an unhappy poet. "My only sentence on you, Allan, is, go in peace. My son Abel led you into sin—alas, I know what Abel was!—and your sin rebounded upon himself; and now I, Abel's father, for the very sake of my fatherhood, will rise up between his sins and any further fruit of misery." He paused a moment, to overcome his emotion. Allan stood in silence before him, with bowed head.

"Let his death ransom thy soul from evil—thy soul that was nearly ruined by his life!" continued the old man. "Thy crime against him was done under sore temptation, unwittingly, in mad haste. Let his father's forgiveness be thy city of refuge from the Avenger of blood. The law of Moses is not destroyed by the gospel of mercy—it is but fulfilled. A life for a life need not mean a death for a death! Thy life is forfeit—truly; let it be forfeit to God. Dedicate it to Him from henceforth, and let thy devotion to His service atone for the past."

Lower and lower bent the head of Allan Grale. This forgiveness of the good and upright minister sounded to him like a very forgiveness from Heaven. Suddenly there seemed to be more in the room than they two. In moments of supreme emotion the veil between the seen and the unseen grows slight. Where was Morna? Where was Abel? A vision of the two floated before Allan's eyes, and he remembered, as in a dream, that in the parable, Abraham, the friend of God, had been within speech of Dives, who was not even the friend of man.

Mr. Gibson took the great family Bible. He opened it at the fly-leaf, that leaf whereon George Vivian had remarked the strange excision.

"Perhaps I was too stern when I cut my son's name from our household record," he said. And slowly, with shaking hands, he rewrote the name of Abel Gibson, once removed in shame and agony. He added the date of his birth. And then he went on: "And

Abel Gibson departed this life on ——” He paused, and turned to Allan, who supplied the date in a whisper.

“The 20th of October.”

He, the father, could bear up no more. Folding his arms over the sacred Book, he lifted up his voice and wept.

But he soon calmed himself with habitual self-command : for he had further counsels to give to Allan and charges to lay upon him.

Edgar Vivian felt he had never had a much more trying task than to bear Mrs. Gibson company in that walk. Would she ask him any question ? and if so, how should he parry it ? What could he say ? But he did not know Mrs. Gibson, nor the power of endurance to which she had attained through long years of the harshest self-discipline. Ease and luxury might have endowed Mrs. Grale with a bountiful presence, but her sister had the balance of spiritual strength and power. Where Mrs. Grale's woes would have gushed forth, regardless of aught but their own relief, worn and wasted Mrs. Gibson would have “thought shame” to trouble any stranger with her cares and sorrows. She told Edgar all about Savoch's one antiquity. She walked with him round the church. As she neared the Gibsons' grave, she thought how kindly his brother had spoken to her last year, and in the prim style of her old-fashioned courtesy, she asked after him. Dead ! Was he really dead ? Could it be true ? And then she, for the first time, understood the reason of the deep mourning Edgar wore. She halted by her daughter's grave : tears rushed to her eyes, and she did not check their flow. It was long since she had wept for dead Lizzie. It was long since she had wept for lost Abel. She only wept for them when she wept for other people's losses and crosses, and for those her tears were ready.

“Dead !” she said, “and he so young and so cheerful ! And he would be such a loss to so many ! Well, well—there's one thing certain—that God doesn't see Death as we see it. I've begun to wonder whether spiritual things are not as much wider and more beautiful and more wonderful than our thoughts of them.”

At that moment they heard a call :— “Marget, Marget !”

It was the schoolmaster's voice ; but it was soft and tremulous. The wife started to obey its summons, but turning she saw her husband coming stumbling through the long grass towards her, and, by some sudden instinct, she stood still, waiting for him by their daughter's grave. Edgar turned away. There must be no witness to their meeting, no listener to their words ! But on the still summer air the schoolmaster's voice was floated towards his ear :

“Abel is dead.”

From the mother there came no cry, no wail, no sob. As he wandered among the graves Edgar could hear quiet murmurs of question and reply. He wondered where Allan was ; he doubted what he ought to do next. But presently Mrs. Gibson relieved him from his perplexity, by stealing softly to his side.

"I suppose you knew before," she said in a broken voice.

"Yes, I knew," Edgar answered, looking with infinite pity on her worn face, now transfigured by tender emotion.

"Well, well," she sighed, "God loved Abel before I did; and so— And I couldn't take care of him," she continued after a pause; "and now it is over—at least, so we say! But I'm not sure that it is over, even for me. And I don't believe anything ever is over for God!"

Edgar did not answer.

"Didn't I say how one gets many thoughts, living so much alone? And I believe Mr. Gibson has had them also. And so poor Mary's son had gone wrong, too! I have been afraid of that. I had my fears about him last year; I had watched the drifting down in Abel, and I knew the signs. And it seems that my poor boy's sudden end has pulled up Mary's boy. Allan would not wait to see me; Mr. Gibson says he thought he had better not, so he's off to the station already, and you are to go after him. You must not think us inhospitable —"

"No, no, no!" interrupted Edgar, fervently.

"You will give my love to Allan. Tell him I'm sorry he did not wait to see me: and he is never to leave off trying to be good, and, if he ever fails, he is always to begin again, and it will grow easier every time. And Mr. Gibson sent good-bye to you, and says maybe you'll excuse him from coming to speak to you himself."

Edgar grasped the little woman's hand warmly, and hurried off, almost without a word, after Allan. At the bend of the road he looked back. The old couple were standing side by side, arm-in-arm, at their little gate. Mr. Gibson waved his hand in dumb token of farewell.

"We are ready to go ourselves now," said Marget Gibson to her husband, as Edgar passed onwards out of their sight. "I have feared we should not be able to die, while our boy might come to want us on the earth." But the mother's longings rose strong within her as she turned to enter the house, and she cried out with a bitter cry:—

"Oh, Abel, my son; my son Abel! Oh, Abel, my son, my son!"

CHAPTER XLVI

CONCLUSION.

THE travellers went on South, halting at Sladford. It was only then Moorland House heard that the one mourned as dead was yet in life.

Alas! there could be no bitter-sweet return of the prodigal son! Allan was separated for ever from the old days and the old ways and the old home. He would soon have to realise that saddest of all truths, that the empty places are generally soon filled, and that if the dead could return they might often find themselves little welcome.

To Mr. Grale, his son's unlooked-for return only brought back

much of the old shame and mortification which he had in a degree lived down. It also proved Dr. Palmer right and himself wrong in many details—not least, in the character of Edgar Vivian. That Allan should return, and not be able to right himself in the eyes of the world, was very galling to the honest old manufacturer, who had always held his own head upright.

Lord Rockford had taken the advice of his kinswoman, Lady Laura—to make hay while the sun shone. He had proposed to Miss Grale, and had been accepted. Mary Anne hastened to impart to him the strange and startling news that the brother who had been mourned as dead—and murdered—was still living. It had been a mistake all the time. Allan, for some purposes of his own, probably a whim, had been staying with friends in some remote wild of Scotland, unconscious of the commotion being made over him at home. She believed he had been “awfully extravagant,” she added, and thought he must have buried himself there to retrench.

Mary Anne Grale, with all her own worldliness, had not risen to the cynical height of remembering that her brother's return might make a great difference in her marriage settlements. She saw how very grave the Viscount looked, but she did not put the gravity down to its true source. She thought he was sorry for Allan. In reality, he was inwardly speculating whether the young lady would still be endowed with the magnificence which could alone justify his converting her into the Viscountess Rockford. But Lady Laura Bond's skilfully-expressed sympathy with Mr. Grale soon enabled her to set Lord Rockford's mind at ease. In fact, Mr. Grale spoke purposely that she should do so.

Mr. Grale was not himself particularly in love with the Viscount; he had, as he expressed it, “taken that young gentleman's measure.” But he believed the young fellow's faults to be tolerably harmless; the thought of a coronet and a title in his family tickled him, and he was quite prepared to pay for the baubles, just as he had paid for Mrs. Grale's memorable diamond cross years before.

“Poor Alny intends to leave the country,” Mr. Grale said to Lady Laura, with whom he was on easy, confidential terms, though not to the extent of revealing to her his son's true history. “He talks of Australia—but I don't yet know whether he will fix on that remote part of the world.”

“Dear me!” she exclaimed. “My dear, good friend, what has he done that he should make an exile of himself?”

“He has passed through great sorrow,” said the old man, bluntly. “He married a sweet young Scotch girl up in the North, and she died. Died not a week ago, hardly; and Allan says he cannot stay in the old country, shall never be happy again in it, and means to settle for life away from it. *Of course*, he will receive a suitable competency from me,” added the speaker with stern emphasis; “but the greater portion of my wealth, Lady Laura, will descend to my daughter.”

"No doubt you are right, my dear sir. Poor Alny!"

"Alny says to me that he does not want a penny," continued Mr. Grale, with a sob in his throat. "He tried my pocket pretty freely before he left home, and he does not forget that. He wishes to work his way out, and work his way onwards when he gets there, as many a better man has done before him; having to work will keep him, he thinks, from dwelling upon the past. Any way, poor fellow, he has managed to make a hash of his life."

But there were hearts in Dering which opened to poor Allan in his sore humiliation. The truth was not declared, and nobody guessed that it was Allan who had sent the other man into the Black Pool; nobody knew, or guessed, who it was that had been found in it. That mystery would remain a mystery to the last.

But Allan was not at Dering. When he had been persuaded, by the wise and impressive counsel of his Uncle Gibson, not to give himself up to the police, he had decided to stay at Sladford. So a small, lonely lodging was taken for him, while Edgar went on to Moorland House to declare the truth there.

Two hearts especially opened to Allan—his mother's and Maria Vivian's; and they knew the truth. Very differently did they open, because their quality was different. The one heart was something like a household closet, where are stored things, good, bad, and indifferent: much that is useful, not a great deal that is valuable. The other heart was like a little shrine, with the sunlight coming through a pictured saint upon the window pane and falling coloured on the white lilies of the altar.

"My dear boy," cried the mother, rushing into his arms in the dreary sitting-room at Sladford: "My dear boy, didn't I always tell you what your sudden passions would bring you to?—didn't I always?—although they were so soon over, and you never meaning any harm? And to think it should happen at last with my poor sister Margaret's boy! But he was a bad one always, and no mistake; and it used to make me quite angry to think how she troubled herself about him. And it's a happy release he was taken at last: he would have come to worse had he lived. One can easily see how it happened. You were struggling together on the edge of that dreadful Pool, and——"

"Don't go on, mother!"

"And you gave him a sharper knock than ordinary," sobbed Mrs. Grale, totally regardless of her son's injunction, "and he happened to fall in—that was all. That was all, Allan. It might have been either of you. Hush! Don't say a word. Don't excite me. I'm flurried enough already, what with this, and Mary Anne's marriage, and everything all happening at once. Your father says you have made up your mind not to come up to Moorland House, and he seems to think it best——"

"It is best, mother," said Allan, again interposing. "It is best that I should go away from here—straight away."

"Well, well, you two will have your own way, whatever I say," went on Mrs. Grale. "But, at any rate, you are to come up to Dering Church on Sunday morning, and sit in our pew, next to me."

"Sit in Dering church on Sunday morning!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you are. I've talked to your father. Seeing is a deal better than hearing for believing, and then there'll be no longer room for doubt. When they see you, they'll *know* that you are in life: and they'll know that it was not you, Alny, who was found in patches and shoddy. I could hardly lift up my head with the disgrace of it, my dear, when the people said it was you. Why, the things ought to have told 'em it wasn't you, and might have told me, too; only you see, my dear, you would sometimes go off for a day or two without as much as a hand-bag, and buy rubbishing shirts and collars at some cheap flaring shop. I have given away all your things, Alny, believing you were dead," she added, the tears running down her cheeks; "but you shall have all new ones. I can take care of your outfit, at any rate."

"I shall need very little, mother," he observed, gently.

"You shall have everything you should have," she persisted. "And Alny, I am going to write out to Australia, to my old friend, Bell Matthewson. She lives there, as you've heard, and she'll be near at hand to keep a kindly eye upon you, and she'll make her house a sort of home for you whenever you choose to enter it. I know Bell Matthewson. I just looked at her portrait the minute before I came out to-day, and thought how strange it was that we two should have met just at the time you had gone away. I told Mary Anne, soon after, that Bell Matthewson always had been in at all my troubles. May be, what we call Fate is always Providence; only we rarely see it, and don't know how to use it."

"Well, then, mother," said Allan, tenderly, "I shall see you at least once more—on Sunday in church."

"See me at least once more!" she echoed, almost angrily. "Of course you will! But you will be back again in a few years, when things have blown over. Perhaps sooner, for things right themselves very soon now-a-days. Now don't contradict me, I'm too nervous. I maintain that you *will* come back. Dr. Palmer says I must not be excited. You'd not wish to make me ill, child!"

"No, no," he murmured.

"And look here," added Mrs. Grale. "It has come into my mind while I've been talking with you, that you might come to us on Saturday night instead of Sunday morning. I'll make it right with your father, though I think he'll see it as I do. Obstinacy may be very good, but common sense is better. You'd like to come when the dark shades of evening lie over the village, rather than in the broad glare of daylight, if your object, as you say, is not to encounter people. Yes: come on Saturday evening and stay with us in private till Sunday evening. Oh, child!"—breaking down with a burst

of grief—"you'll not begrudge that bit of time to your poor unhappy mother!"

"I will come," faltered Allan. "It is best as you say—dear, dear mother."

On the Sunday morning, to the surprise of an excited congregation, Allan Grale sat in the pew between his father and mother. Mary Anne was with them. The golden sun shone down upon the young man's head, and on the deep mourning which he wore. He looked greatly changed. Everybody thought him that. His hair was bright as ever, but his face was worn and thin and sad. He never lifted his eyes from his book, and he would keep his hand pressed on his brow for minutes together, as if he had a pain there. Service over, the people, rich and poor, gathered in the churchyard to greet and welcome him as he came out; but he passed quietly through a door in the vestry and escaped them.

That evening, in the Sabbath stillness of the gloaming, Allan's last interview with Maria Vivian took place. Allan had been to the Court; the old General asked it as a favour; and after warm farewells were said there, Maria walked with him to the great trees at the bend of the avenue, and there they halted, under the leafy shade. They knew that they were parting for ever—but only for the for ever on earth.

What took place at that interview, what they said to one another, lay between themselves. It was a secret, to be cherished and held sacred in their own hearts. That the hour was fraught with sorrow the deepest and bitterest, who could doubt?

"We are nearer, Allan, to one another than we ever were before, now that we each hold the same goal in view," Maria whispered to him, when the parting moment came. "God keep you, my dear one! God bless and guide you!"

His tears fell like rain on her cold cheek, as he kissed her and sobbed forth his last words. The wind was rising; the autumn evening was growing dusk and dreary. Maria stood with clasped, uplifted hands and streaming eyes, as she watched him away. The little pearl cross lay on her dress; it was he who had given it to her in the happy days gone by; he had pressed his cheek to it for a moment now, and asked her to let it put her in remembrance of him when she wore it. As Maria turned back to the house with her weight of pain, she said to herself that she should always wear the cross; always, and no other ornament.

Allan said farewell to his mother and Mary Anne that night, and returned to Sladford. The following day he departed for Liverpool, his father and Edgar Vivian accompanying him; and on the Tuesday morning he sailed away in the good ship that was to carry him to the other side of the world.

Little remains to be told of Dering. Two marriages took place

shortly, though not quite at the same time—that of Edgar Vivian with Agnes Palmer, and of Lord Rockford with Mary Anne Grale. The one wedding ceremony was as unpretendingly quiet and sunnily joyful, as the other was grand and crowded and unsatisfactory. Agnes was able to keep her promise of not wandering far from her father, for the young couple took up their abode at Dering Court, which Edgar would inherit at his uncle's death. Agnes did not have to encounter the constant supervision and criticism of Mrs. Vivian; for the General, who could never rally to his full strength, was ordered by the medical men to take up his abode in Bath.

The gaiety of the place suited Mrs. Vivian, the General himself liked it, and henceforth they only appeared at Dering Court during the bright, warm weeks of summer. Dr. Palmer would seize upon that occasion to make his daughter and son-in-law spend a little of the time with him. Lettice and her husband would come to meet them; and Lettice would saucily observe that Agnes had escaped what was good for her, for to reside with Mrs. Vivian would have been a wholesome cross! Maria divided her time between the two places—Bath and Dering Court.

And when, as the next few years rolled on, after the General had been made intensely happy by seeing a George and an Edgar of another generation, there came a little maiden, it was Maria who was asked to give her, if not her own name, at least a name of her own choosing.

"Will you let her be called Morna?" she asked.

"And the next shall be Maria," whispered Agnes to her husband.

"And what about you and Lettice?" he asked, playfully.

Agnes laughed. "Ours will do for second names," she answered. "The little ones call us 'mamma' and 'aunt' already, but you and Charlie are not to be allowed to degenerate into that. You are always to call us Agnes and Lettice—and there is to be no doubt who you mean, sir."

It was during the passing of these years that the two old sisters, bereaved of their beloved ones, met once more.

Some scholastic business called Mr. Gibson to the Scottish capital for a day; his wife accompanied him; and Mrs. Grale, hearing of the proposed visit, travelled thither for a passing interview.

It was a painful meeting. But as the sisters sat, hands clasped in hands and tears answering to tears, the one could utter no reproach against the other. If Allan had given the blow which dealt Abel his death, Abel's own wicked conduct had provoked it. Rather they spoke soothingly and affectionately of that hope which remains to us all—the reunion in the future life, when this troubled life shall be over.

"There will be no partings there, Polly," sighed Mrs. Gibson, "no weary care or misunderstandings, no hearts breaking in silence and fear—and both my dear ones are already there, gone on to it."

"Ay," said Mrs. Grale, hushing her sobs. "We've both had

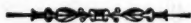
our trials here in one shape or another, Marget, you and me, and we're each living in our old age in a lonely home, no children around to cheer us. But the Lord will give them back to us in Heaven."

"I'm just living on for it, Mary. So is Mr. Gibson also, I know, only he does not speak of it."

"What odd things those dreams were that came to you and to me!" exclaimed Mrs. Grale. "We both had them in the self-same night, you know, Marget, and it was the dreadful night when it all happened; and the Black Pool was in the dreams as plain as plain, and Abel and Allan were there, and you and me! We little thought then what the dreams might have warned us of!"

"Ay, Mary, dreams are strange matters," said Mrs. Gibson, "and they come from the Unseen. We cannot tell how or why here, but we shall know hereafter."

THE END.



AFTER MANY DAYS.

YES, it is over and ended—
The dream of delight and the vision,
Over, all of it over,
Mask of lover and lover;
Lovers' ways that we wended
In a world that was always Elysian,
Lovers' vows that were spoken,
Lovers' lives that were blended,
Only to cheat and be broken,
Only to droop and be ended:
Gone!—not a hope to remind us
Of the darkened Eden behind us.

Tears of a tardy contrition,
Tears for a sign and a token
Of a true, true heart that is broken,
A false, false heart that pretended—
Vain now the dream is all ended:
Yet spare me the smile of derision,
The laugh that will wake on the morrow,
For my vision that was but a vision,
My sorrow that is but a sorrow.
Go!—there is nothing to bind us,
And wherever the future may find us,
Eden lies buried behind us.—GEORGE COTTERELL.

PETTIFER'S CLERK.

IT is said that every woman has her favourite preacher, her favourite doctor, and her favourite disease. That some women have, experience shows us.

Mrs. Clive's favourite preacher was an eloquent man, who thumped the cushions well in his lavender-kid gloves, assured his male listeners that they would go to perdition unless they mended their manners and were more indulgent to their wives, and compared the wives to angel-martyrs. Her favourite medical attendant was one Dr. Zoar; and her favourite disease was nerves. Mrs. Clive was a widow and rich, able to indulge in all her whims and fancies; and she was yet young. She lived at that fashionable inland watering-place Spafeld, which was gay and crowded all the year round.

In the wide and open street, leading direct from the Parade, stood the handsome shop of William Pettifer, chemist and druggist. William Pettifer had grown elderly in its service, wealthy also; he liked to take his ease now, and turned the shop over chiefly to his manager and shopmen. He was the brother of the first physician in the town, Dr. Charles Pettifer, and was held to be a man of consideration. His only son, John, who had been to Oxford, and was otherwise liberally educated, was studying for the medical profession. Just now the manager was ill, Mr. Pettifer was also ill; and John, at his father's request, might be seen often in the shop, serving sometimes.

One morning, when John Pettifer was standing behind the counter on the left-hand side as you entered, three assistants in white aprons being behind the counter on the right-hand side, there stood beside him a tall, earnest-looking, handsome man, whose years might be about the same as John's, midway between twenty and thirty. They were deep in conversation, their heads bent together, and the young men opposite were serving customers, when an open barouche dashed up to the door. It contained Mrs. Clive and her daughter, the latter a charming girl of eighteen, just home from school. Mrs. Clive's carriage might be seen before the shop most days; not to get the prescriptions of Dr. Zoar made up, for he furnished his own medicines—it was safer, he told his patients; but to purchase some specific or other, good for the nerves.

The footman leaped down from his place and awaited the orders of his mistress. She merely motioned for the door to be opened.

"My dear, I shall send you in," she said to her daughter; "and then I know there'll be no mistake. Ask for a bottle of Green-sage Nervine. Be particular: *Green-sage Nervine*. I know it must be most excellent, for Dr. Zoar recommended it."

Miss Eleanor Clive stepped lightly on the pavement to enter the

shop. She was a pretty, graceful, innocent girl, healthy and sunny-natured; her cheeks had a delicate brightness, resembling the blossom of a peach. She went in with the light, elastic tread, which, alas, one only has in the golden time of youth. She wore a summer muslin dress and a pale blue gossamer bonnet, which set off the fair face and golden hair, went straight up to the counter on the left, and held out her hand to John Pettifer.

"How are you, Miss Lella?" he said, shaking the hand heartily—for he and she had been always well-acquainted. Dr. Pettifer and the late Mr. Clive were intimate friends, and John and Eleanor often met at the Doctor's house or at her own.

"Oh, quite well, thank you," she said, her face all smiling dimples; "and so happy to be at home again. Mamma has told me to ask for—what was it?—bending her face to consider.

"The 'Unfailing Life Elixir—' was that it?" suggested the young man, laughing.

"No, no; I remember now. It was to be a bottle of Green-sage Nervine. Something sure to be very good, mamma says, as the new doctor, Dr. Zoar, recommended it."

Mr. John Pettifer turned to the well-furnished shelves behind him, and saw that what he sought was just beyond the friend he had been talking with. "Would you give me one of those small bottles—there, in the second compartment," he said to him, to avoid pushing by.

The stranger had been gazing at the pretty vision which was brightening the shop with its presence; he said to himself that he had never seen so sweet a face, and fell in love with it there and then. She was looking at him. She saw a pale, serious-looking man with (she thought) the nicest face she ever saw. A faint, bright flush came into her cheeks as she caught his earnest eyes fixed on her. It was a case of mutual attraction.

John Pettifer put the small bottle of Green-sage Nervine into paper, went round the counter, and escorted Miss Clive to the door. Then he handed it to her.

"Is that a new—clerk—of yours?" she asked him as she took it. The word "shopman" had been on her tongue, but the stranger looked too much of a gentleman for an ordinary shopman, and she substituted the other.

"Oh, to be sure," answered John Pettifer, laughing a little; "my father's new book-keeper."

"What a charming girl!" exclaimed the new clerk, as John Pettifer went back behind the counter when the barouche had driven off. "Who is she?"

"Her name is Eleanor Clive; she is an only child and an heiress—a little sweetheart of mine in the days gone by."

"Do you mean that? Are you going to—to make up to her?"

"I!" laughed John—"as if they'd look at me! Had I been my uncle's son instead of my father's, it might have been different. No,

no ; there's nothing of that kind between little Lella and me. Mrs. Clive would ——Why here she is, back again."

The carriage had once more stopped opposite the door. Mrs. Clive was bending forward, and John Pettifer went out.

"I am so very sorry I forgot to tell Eleanor to enquire after your father, Mr. John," said Mrs. Clive, who was extremely affable and devoid of pride. "We heard a sad account of him yesterday from Dr. Pettifer, whom we met on the Parade."

"Oh, thank you, he is much better to-day," was John's reply. "I will tell him you enquired after him."

"Do so, and——dear me !"

A dark man came along the pavement, with a brisk, jaunty step. He looked to be about forty years of age, but was probably older : his face had a sort of perpetual, alluring smile upon it, and a great deal of glossy black hair. The ladies of Spafield called him handsome ; Mrs. Clive thought him very much so. He was fashionably dressed, and in his white shirt-front shone diamonds of the first water. We accord more latitude to a foreigner in the matter of attire than we allow ourselves, and that the wearer of the diamond studs was not an Englishman, his yellow skin and peculiar eyes betrayed.

"Ah, Dr. Zoar, how do you do ?" exclaimed Mrs. Clive from her carriage, as she bent forward and held out her hand to the dark man.

"My dear lady," he exclaimed, grasping it, "how are *you* ? That is the great question."

"Oh, I had a wretched night, woke up nearly every hour, and was all of a shake this morning ; but I am now going to try the new remedy, the Green-sage Nervine.—My daughter," added Mrs. Clive, perceiving the great Doctor's eyes were fixed with curiosity upon the young lady. "Eleanor, this is my very good friend, Dr. Zoar."

Eleanor bowed, but she did not put out her hand, as might have been expected of her to any one introduced in this way, for she was of an open, guileless nature, and not much more than a child in her ways yet. Dr. Zoar, however, extended his hand, and she had to meet it.

Meanwhile the stranger in Pettifer's shop had stood watching what took place outside. His eyes seemed fascinated by the sight of Dr. Zoar ; the latter detected them fixed upon him, stared for a moment questioningly in return, and then made an enquiry in an undertone of John Pettifer.

"Who is that man behind the counter there ?—a new shopman ?"

"Oh, he's my clerk," carelessly responded John Pettifer. "Just engaged him."

"If you are not too busy, will you drive home with us to luncheon, Dr. Zoar ?" cried Mrs. Clive. "And then, perhaps, you will prescribe for me."

"With pleasure, my dear madam," replied the doctor.

Once more somebody else came along the pavement : a woman this time. She was thin almost as a skeleton, had a pale, sallow

face and malignant light grey eyes. John Pettifer's new clerk fancied he saw a faint quick sign pass between Dr. Zoar and this woman with the evil eyes. But she passed swiftly on her way; while the Doctor took his seat in the carriage opposite Mrs. Clive and her daughter, and was whirled away.

These six people who met at the door of the drug-mart—Mrs. and Miss Clive, Dr. Zoar, the thin woman with the pitiless eyes, John Pettifer and his new clerk—these are the chief actors in the drama. The accident which brought them all together at that same hour—no, the fate, for there is no "accident" in this life—was a somewhat singular one. But events will unfold themselves as we go on.

"So that is your great physician, is it, John?" observed Pettifer's clerk, as Dr. Zoar and the carriage disappeared. "I had forgotten the name when you spoke just now, but I have not forgotten *him*."

"Did you know him, then?"

"I did once. He was attached to our regiment as native medical assistant when we were quartered in the West Indies."

"I thought he looked curiously at you."

"He would not know me. I was only a youngster then, just joined; had not grown into the tall, fierce warrior I've become since," he added, laughing. "No, Dr. Zoar would not know me now. Look here, Pettifer—I'm your new clerk, you understand, for a bit, and nothing else; I heard you tell him so. Name, Mr. Francis, if anybody's curious on the score. No one knows me here."

"With all my heart," assented John. "But what's the point?"

"I should like to keep my eye upon that renowned physician for a short time. It may be my duty to do so in the interest of your community. How long do you say he has been practising at Spafeld?"

"About ten months or a year. He came down upon the place with a splash and a dash, and took the women's hearts by storm, putting the noses of the old practitioners out of joint. He has become the fashion, and you can understand what that implies. Some of the women pin their faith to him as an infallible saint, neither quite human nor quite divine, but something of both."

"He *is* clever."

"What do you know of him?"

"I knew him to be a man who was evil to the back-bone; who only lived to prey upon his fellow-creatures," answered Pettifer's clerk. "He is a powerful mesmerist of the most unscrupulous type. For his own aggrandisement, or for greed of gold, Zoar would not hesitate to commit any crime denounced in the Decalogue."

II.

A WEEK went on. Dr. Zoar became more intimate, day by day, at Mrs. Clive's; and made himself agreeable, or strove to do so, to Lella as well as to her mother. But that young lady could not, as her discerning maid, Patsey, expressed it, "abide him." One day the

Doctor, his face elongated with serious concern, expressed a gentle doubt about Miss Eleanor's health.

"Her health!" cried Mrs. Clive in dismay. "Do you really fear she is ill, Doctor? Why that would be a climax—for Lella to be ill with nerves as well as me!"

"Ah, my dear lady, it is not 'nerves' that we need fear in your daughter's case," said Dr. Zoar, with compassion. "If what I suspect be amiss, she ——"

"Why, mamma, I am as well as I can be," spoke up Lella.

"Be quiet, child; Dr. Zoar must know best. What were you about to say, Doctor?"

"Only that she may require our utmost care for a little time. Allow me ——" And Dr. Zoar, a wicked gleam of satisfaction shooting like lightning out of his black eyes into Lella's, put one hand upon her brow and the other hand upon his own brow. The girl would have drawn back. "Allow me half a moment," he murmured as he closed his eyes.

"Hush! Lella," enjoined her mother, in a tone of mystery and awe. "He is communing with the spiritual power that lies within him. It is the way in which he ascertains beyond doubt the nature of his patients' hidden ailments."

"I'm sure I have no ailments, hidden or not hidden," thought Lella. But she was under the rule of strict obedience to her mother, and remained still.

Presently the Doctor dropped his hands, opened his eyes, and heaved a sigh. "There *is* mischief inwardly, my dear madam," he said, with deep compassion. "I thought my observation could not be mistaken; it never failed me yet. But it is very slight at present, and I shall be able to arrest it."

"What is it that's the matter with me?" asked Lella, doubting still, yet a little impressed.

"Sit here," said the Doctor, placing her in a large elbow chair with her head resting back on its cushions. "I must try a little clairvoyance."

"But I don't like clairvoyance; I have heard all sorts of strange things about it," said Lella, in alarm. "Mamma, I don't want clairvoyance to be tried on me."

Dr. Zoar regarded her with the pitying smile of a superior being; through which pitying smile, all the same, shone dimly the look of a hawk in the act of pouncing upon an innocent little chicken.

"My dear young lady," said the Doctor, "the late improvements in our physical science enable us to see the heart of the earth as plainly as you can see the dome of that church yonder in the noon-day sun. Our new science reaches as high as the clouds, and is as deep as—as—the bottomless abyss. By it, we, to whom is granted the power of discernment, can read off mankind as a child's primer; and the thoughts of all men are an open book to us."

He looked at her keenly as he spoke; Lella, conscious that she wasn't thinking any good of the speaker himself at that particular moment, couldn't help blushing and looking a little confused, nothing of which escaped the watchful eye of the seer. But Mrs. Clive, soft and credulous, groaned approval, and folded her hands solemnly.

Dr. Zoar heard it. "Madam," he said, turning to her, "do you remember the day, about a fortnight ago, when I found it necessary to put you into a state of clairvoyance upon your doing me the honour to consult me after a particularly aggravated nervous attack?"

"Perfectly," answered Mrs. Clive. "I remember I had put on my new lilac silk that day, and that absurd Patsey said I was ill because the waist was too tight."

"Just so," replied the Doctor. "Well, madam, I will tell you now that on that occasion you indicated to me, when in your trance, that my services would shortly be required for another member of your family. I did not mention it then, lest it should alarm you."

"Most wonderful!" murmured Mrs. Clive. "Oh, my dear Doctor, what is science coming to?"

The Doctor did not say; perhaps he did not know. He placed a hand upon each of Lella's shoulders, to begin operations. Lella pushed his hands away.

"Are you obliged to touch me, sir?" she said, shrinkingly.

The feeling was not lost upon Dr. Zoar, and he frowned wickedly.* But the frown passed at once into a tender smile. "We can do without it," he said.

Passing his hands before her and about her with the usual passes, Lella was soon in the mesmeric sleep. The Doctor put no questions to her. He made his observation of the sleeper in silence, and then imparted his opinion to the mother.

"The mischief has been going on for some time," he said. "It is the result of overstraining the mental powers. She has been doing too much at school. All girls do, now-a-days. The brain gets too heavily taxed, and then there's—pardon me, my dear lady—the deuce to pay."

"Oh, yes," gasped Mrs. Clive; "but what, my dear Doctor, has it done to her?"

"Well, I cannot yet quite say. But unless the mischief which has set in can be arrested, it might end in epilepsy."

Mrs. Clive gave a shriek. "Oh, Doctor! Doctor!"

"My dearest lady, pray be calm. I said, unless the mischief can be arrested. But I think I can arrest it: I am almost sure I can. But I must take her into my hands as my patient from to-morrow."

"Oh, pray, pray take her from to-day," implored Mrs. Clive. "What a dreadful thing! My only child! I have allowed her to stay at school too long."

"Yes, that is where it lies—she has stayed there too long."

"How foolish I have been!" groaned the poor lady.

"I shall do my best to set her right," said the Doctor, as he began to make the passes necessary to arouse Lella. "And, my dear madam, I must warn you not to impart to her exactly what it is that we fear; there's no need to frighten her."

But when did a bewildered mother ever take judicious advice and restrain her tongue? Lella, who was feeling a little dazed and stupid after her mesmeric trance, but not sufficiently so to deaden her curiosity, began to put questions the instant Dr. Zoar had left.

"Mamma, what did he say after he had put me to sleep?"

"Oh!" moaned Mrs. Clive, putting her hands to her face, but explaining nothing.

"I wonder you let him do it! Putting me to sleep indeed, as if I were a baby! What did he say, mamma?"

"Oh, my darling child, he said the root of it all was that you had been overworked at school!"

"I'm sure I was not," said Lella, indignantly: "our lessons were as easy as they could be."

"And he said," sobbed Mrs. Clive, who had broken into tears, "that if we—we did not take great care of you now you might have a fit of epilepsy."

"Mamma, I don't believe a word of it."

"And he is going to bring you some powders to-morrow which you are to take; and he thinks they will put you right again, and avert the evil. He feels sure of it, he says. But, my dear, I shall never forgive myself for having left you so long at that wretched school!"

Lella ran over to kiss and soothe her mother, and then tossed her rebellious little head. She did not mind taking a few harmless powders—nothing but chalk and flour mixed, perhaps!—but she felt persuaded Dr. Zoar, to whom she had taken an unaccountable dislike, was inventing this supposed tendency to illness only to put a few of her mother's guineas into his capacious pocket.

Naturally it stood to reason that the sleepless night of torment which Mrs. Clive passed, after going to bed, should bring on a real attack of nerves in the morning instead of a fancied one. A servant was despatched in haste for Dr. Zoar. But the man came back without the Doctor. That renowned leech had been summoned to a patient in the country, and would return to Spafeld by the two o'clock train.

"Give me the red lavender," said Mrs. Clive to her maid. "Of course he will come to me the instant he gets back; but how I am to live through the hours till then, I'm sure I don't know."

Lella took the opportunity of walking out. Attended by Patsey (a corruption of the young lady's when a child, the maid's name being Patterley) she went forth to buy blue ribbon for her hair, and profited by her liberty to visit the pastrycook's and buy some chocolate creams. The shop chanced to be next door to Pettifer's, the chemist and druggist; and Lella was just in the act of eating a tempting raspberry

tart, when who should come in, to eat, he said, tarts and puffs on his own score, but Pettifer's clerk.

"Good morning, Miss Lella," said he, putting out his hand to shake hers. By which familiar address it might be perceived that they had improved their acquaintance since the first day of meeting in the shop. In fact they had met in the street, and Lella had again been several times sent by her mother into Pettifer's while she waited outside in the carriage. Pettifer's clerk had made use of these occasions; and Miss Lella was far from reproaching him for it.

"Do you know Dr. Zoar, Mr. Francis?" Lella suddenly asked him, as they sauntered together up a side walk; the young lady having left Patsey in the shop to pay, and to consume what she pleased herself before coming after them.

"Yes—a little," replied Pettifer's clerk. "Why?"

"Do you like him?" pursued she.

"Not much."

"I don't like him at all; I can't bear him," said Miss Lella. "He has been persuading mamma that I am ill, and is going to send me some powders to take."

Pettifer's clerk had a frank, good-looking countenance, but it wore a very black expression just now.

"What does he say is the matter with you?" asked he, hurriedly.

"He says I am out of health, and that it is all owing to my having been overworked at school—which is not true, you know. And he says that I am in danger of having a fit."

Quite a strong word, meant for the absent Zoar, broke from Pettifer's clerk. He coughed, and turned away his head to drown it. "Did he say what sort of fit?" he asked, turning it back again.

"He told mamma, and she told me," answered Lella. "Let me try to recollect—I don't know much about fits, you see, and forget their names. It was—yes, I think—apoplexy."

A sudden thought, giving rise to strange emotion, seemed to seize Pettifer's clerk. He stood still and gazed at his companion.

"Was it epilepsy?" he eagerly questioned.

"Why, yes; I quite remember now," she said. "That was it: epilepsy."

"Did you ever have such a thing before?"

"Never in all my life. Fancy," laughing a little, "my having had a fit of any sort!"

"It may be no laughing matter," he murmured in a half reproving tone. And then he was silent.

"Oh, and I forgot to tell you—he put me in a mesmeric sleep," she continued. "It was while he kept me in it that he told mamma what was the matter with me. I tell her that he only wants to doctor me for the sake of the fees it will bring him, and that the powders will be harmless, all flour and chalk. There comes Patsey: I see her at the end of the walk."

Pettifer's clerk turned to the innocent, prattling girl, took her hands in his in a very solemn fashion, and spoke in a solemn tone.

"I hope it may be so—that his powders will be harmless powders ; but let me impress upon you one thing, Miss Clive—do not take more of his powders than you can help. Do not let him mesmerise you. Above all, pray attend to this—should you find that the powders affect you in any way, that they make you giddy, or sick, or drowsy, write me word at once. Will you promise to do this ?"

"Yes," she answered, her pretty face one rosy blush. "But why? Would they be bad powders, do you fancy?"

"Never mind why," he said, his eyes, beautiful in their earnestness, gazing anxiously into hers. "I have only your welfare at heart in pressing this request upon you. Will you put your trust in me?"

"Yes, I will ; I'll not forget," she said, lowering her own eyes in happy shyness. "Of course, you know all about powders, being John Pettifer's clerk."

A smile parted his lips. "I will whisper a secret to you," said he, "but you must let it lie between you and me. I am not John Pettifer's clerk, and I hardly know how the mistake arose. Had I been his clerk I should not talk and walk with you as I do now. I am a gentleman."

"Oh, yes," she answered eagerly, lifting for a moment her face ; "I could see that from the first. I thought perhaps you were going to be a doctor, like John, and wanted to learn about drugs."

"May God protect you, my dear!" he whispered with strange emotion. "Remember."

When Patsey came within hearing, a moment afterwards, they were conversing soberly about the accumulation of dust in the road and the culpable negligence of the water-carts.

III.

FOR two days the powders furnished by Dr. Zoar did not appear to have any effect upon Miss Clive, good, bad or indifferent. On the third morning she had a slight attack of shivering, attended with nausea. Dr. Zoar, sent for by her mother in hot haste, became very angry when he arrived on the scene, protesting that no powder could have been administered to his patient that day, and that this indisposition was the result of the neglect.

"When once a course of these admirable powders has been entered upon it must be continued to the end, without interruption ; I warned you of that, my dear madam, at the first," he said to Mrs. Clive.

"But Patsey says that she did give the powder this morning."

"And so I did, ma'am," struck in Patsey, with obstinacy. "I gave it directly after breakfast."

"Yes," said Eleanor, speaking for herself. "It is the powder that has made me ill."

"Of course it is!" cried the Doctor, twirling his fingers in derision.

"Well, sir, and I say the same as Miss Eleanor," cried bold Patsey. Upon which a curiously evil look shot out from his black eyes.

"I do wish, Dr. Zoar, you would not persuade mamma that I want these powders, for I am sure I do not," added Eleanor. "I don't think I can take any more of them."

A short scene ensued. The Doctor insisting that the powders were more necessary than anybody but himself knew or suspected, and must be taken; Eleanor objecting, and growing a little excited over it. Mrs. Clive wrung her hands, and was more helpless than a baby, except that she upheld Dr. Zoar. Woman's credulity! the world is full of it. I know dozens of ladies of intelligence who could not be induced to cut out a new flounce on a Friday.

The commotion ended by Dr. Zoar putting Eleanor into a mesmeric sleep, with a view, as he remarked, to calming her nerves. He then, pressing one of his hands upon her forehead and the other hand upon his own, "held commune with her spirit," or said he did. That over, he requested a private interview with Mrs. Clive, which took place in the drawing-room.

Dr. Zoar opened the conference with a gloomy look upon his face and a couple of sighs. "Madam," said he, "I have nothing good to impart to you. The inward mischief which, as I hinted to you, had already set in, has increased rapidly upon your daughter. I shall *not* be able to save her from epilepsy."

Mrs. Clive trembled from head to foot in her chair, stared, and gasped. She could not speak a word.

"I cannot save her from one or two attacks of it; indeed, unless I mistake, she has had a slight one to-day—and, my dear lady, I know that I do not mistake. But I can cure her yet; only she must be entirely under my charge.

"I will call in Dr. Pettifer," said the mother. "He will consult with you, and ——"

Dr. Zoar's brows darkened wrathfully. "No, madam," he interrupted, "I must treat this case alone. I am responsible to you to carry it through successfully, and I will do so. I have treated scores of such cases, and brought them all to a triumphant issue. But I require *your* co-operation in it."

"Mine!" cried Mrs. Clive, in dismayed alarm, for she held a mortal dread of personally attending on any kind of sickness. "In what way, Doctor?"

The Doctor drew his chair in front of Mrs. Clive, and bent his body forward; his voice took a low, impressive tone, his face wore its most persuasive aspect.

"My dear lady," he said, lifting his hand, "that maid—Patsey—no more administered the powder to your daughter than to you. She must be removed from attendance, and give place to a skilled nurse who understands this kind of illness. What I require of you is this—that you send Patsey away for a week or two. She must go out of

the house ; it is absolutely essential. As you perceive, she is ready to uphold our dear patient in her little rebellious ways, and I cannot allow her to remain here."

"Oh, that's very easily done," said Mrs. Clive, immensely relieved. "I will give Patsey a fortnight's holiday to go to see her old mother in Hampshire—she is always ready for *that*. But how shall we find a suitable nurse, Doctor?"

"I will undertake it. I know of one who is the very thing—if we shall be fortunate enough to find her disengaged. Her terms are high ; but ——"

"Never mind the terms ; that's nothing," said Mrs. Clive imploringly. "What is her name ? I know some of the nurses here."

"I don't think you know this one. Her name is Tamarin."

"Is she a West-Indian ?" quickly asked Mrs. Clive.

Doctor Zoar's yellow skin took an unpleasant tinge under the light of the green Venetian blind. "Why do you ask ?" he said.

"Because, is not Tamarin a West-Indian name ? A friend of mine brought over a coloured woman from Barbadoes, and her Christian name was Tamarin."

The Doctor had had time to recover his suavity. "My dear lady, I have not put the question to her," he said, graciously. "Whether she may be a native of this place or the other is of no consequence. She is a skilful and attentive nurse, and I shall secure her for Miss Eleanor if I can. Meanwhile you will do your part by sending Patsey out of the house to-night."

Poor credulous Mrs. Clive ! Patsey was safe away by nightfall, and Tamarin, who did not appear to have any other name, had taken her place. Dr. Zoar had been fortunate enough to find her "disengaged." It was the strange-looking woman with the sallow face and the cold, leaden, malignant grey eyes.

In a short time Spafeld was electrified by the report that that sweet, bright girl, Eleanor Clive, had been attacked with epileptic seizures, the result of an overtaxed brain. Very slight, as yet, they were said to be. And people ran about remarking upon the mistaken wickedness of the high-pressure system of education in schools, and of trying to make girls learn as much as boys. Amidst those who heard the report was Pettifer's clerk.

"John," said he to his friend, bustling in to take his place behind the counter, where he might be often seen now, "there must be something devilish going on there."

"That's strong," remarked Mr. John Pettifer. "In what way ?—and where ?"

"With that charming girl," returned Pettifer's clerk, in excitement. "You know what they are saying about her."

"Well," said John, laconically, "the new system of education *is* a mistake. What on earth do girls want with all the languages, dead and living, and all the sciences under the sun ? Will it make them

better wives and mothers? A Stuff! When a sufficient number of minds have given way under it to make a stir, people will see its fallacy."

"You can't seriously believe that Eleanor Clive's mind has given way through overpressure!" retorted Pettifer's clerk.

"What, then, has done it?"

"Zoar."

"Zoar!"

"I believe it with my whole heart. He has induced these fits by his treatment; though what his object may be I cannot in the least imagine. The girl was bright and healthy as a girl can be; no more in danger of epilepsy than I am. Zoar, in conjunction with that diabolical nurse they have placed about her—Now don't laugh, John; the woman's countenance carries Satan upon it even more than his does; and that's saying a good deal."

"I agree with you," laughed John Pettifer. "But the woman's face, hard as it is, would not frighten people into epileptic fits."

Pettifer's clerk put his elbow on the counter, and brought his face close to John's. "Over in Jamaica," he said in a half whisper, "when our regiment was there, and I, as I have told you, was only a youngster in it, that man, Zoar, was thought to have dealings with the powers of darkness, he did such strangely clever things. Amidst his other accomplishments he could throw any one into a fit of epilepsy."

"Nonsense, Frank! Impossible!" said John Pettifer.

"As truly as that I am here, it was so," solemnly retorted Pettifer's clerk. "I have myself seen him try his power upon more than one subaltern. After administering a dose or two of some mysterious white powder, which powder he jealously guarded from the public eye, the poor fellow would froth at the mouth, his limbs would be convulsed, and he had all the appearance of being in the agonies of a fit. If it was not true epilepsy, it was the closest imitation of it ever seen; nevertheless some of our more experienced and older officers declined to believe that the fit was genuine epilepsy. Now I think he is trying the same thing upon Miss Clive."

"Why, the fellow must be a fiend!" exclaimed John Pettifer.

"He's worse than that," said Pettifer's clerk. "But what is to be done?"

John shook his head. He was of a cautious temperament. "No one has the right to interfere with Mrs. Clive," he said. "If you told her all this about Zoar, she would not believe it. She's infatuated with him."

"Could you not speak to your uncle, Dr. Pettifer? Ask him to drop in and see Lella, and see into what's going on there."

"I might ask him till the moon's blue; it would be all the same," said John Pettifer. "He would not interfere with Zoar; would not meet him in consultation for the world. There's no doctor of standing here that would do so. They call him a quack."

"Then is Lella to be abandoned to Zoar's mercy ; to be allowed to die, or to go mad ?" asked Pettifer's clerk, in fiery resentment.

"That's just like you, Frank—always in extremes," said John, coolly. "If Zoar is bringing on fits, or their semblance, he must be doing it from self-interest ; to frighten the mother possibly, and chisel her out of a lot of golden guineas. But he won't carry the thing too far ; rest assured of that : it would damage him with his other patients, his lady-worshippers. By-and-by little Lella will be pronounced well again. You'll see."

"I wish I could see ! And I wish I could dive into the fellow's unholy motives !" growled Pettifer's clerk.

One of Dr. Zoar's motives, holy or unholy, was shortly made known to Mrs. Clive. It might not have been allowed to transpire quite so soon ; but, perceiving that her daughter grew worse instead of better, Mrs. Clive's uneasiness increased, and she gathered up enough courage to tell Dr. Zoar that she must really call in further advice—that of Dr. Pettifer. Dr. Pettifer knew Eleanor's constitution : in fact, he had always attended the house until his old-fashioned mode of treatment had been superseded by the more brilliant skill of Dr. Zoar.

"Dear madam," said the Doctor, after a little pause spent in silent commune with himself, "there is only one thing that will restore your daughter. I have tried my best ; but the malady is more powerful than my counteracting power ; yet there is one way of cure left."

"What is it ?"

Dr. Zoar played with his gorgeous watch-chain, as he took Mrs. Clive's hand and purred over it, like a cat purring over a mouse. "She must be instantly removed to a different climate, my dear lady ; I think I should recommend Spain ; and she must be married before she starts for it."

"Married !" exclaimed the astonished lady. "Why, she's not even engaged yet." And there she broke down into silence. "Who would marry her ?" she added presently, out of a sea of bewildering ideas—"a girl who has epilepsy ?"

"I would," said Dr. Zoar.

Mrs. Clive recoiled. Any notion of marrying her pet Doctor herself had never struck her, and she would have driven the thought away as unpalatable if it had : but she had liked the homage of the fascinating man very well, and it was a sort of blow to her vanity to hear of its being transferred to one younger and fairer than she. To think of Lella in connection with him was—well, profanation.

"Impossible !" she said, sharply.

Dr. Zoar toyed with his watch-chain and smiled, and stroked his silky whiskers.

"As you please," he answered, with careless suavity. "Of course, as you please. I show you the means, my dear lady, that will undoubtedly restore your child—a long sea voyage and a husband whose whole soul is devoted to her. Neglect those means, and

what remains for her?—repulsive suffering, and madness ending in death. It is my bounden duty to place before you these two alternatives."

"But Eleanor would not marry you to save her life," said poor Mrs. Clive, remembering another phase of the matter.

The Doctor smiled still and rubbed his hands softly. "My dear friend," said he, "there are ways and means to be used, in these cases, which overcome all objections. And your daughter must obey you. She is under age, you know."

"Yes, that's just it—she's under age," said the perplexed lady. "She *can't* marry without the consent of her guardians. It isn't only myself."

"Oh," said the Doctor, another smile effacing the keen, surprised light that shot from his eyes. "Who else is there?"

"One is Dr. Pettifer; the other is Colonel Matson. If Eleanor marries without their consent, she forfeits half her fortune."

"Dear me!—I really never knew that Miss Eleanor had any fortune to forfeit," said the unsophisticated man. "Is it much?"

"She has twenty thousand pounds on her wedding day. Only ten thousand if she marries without consent. And of course there'll be all mine later on, which is more than twice as much again."

"Poof!" cried the Doctor, veiling a greedy look of delight under his closed eyelids: "ten thousand pounds is a bagatelle, not worth the thought of an honest man. For my own part, I wish Miss Eleanor had no money whatever."

"How generous he is!" thought the Doctor's listener. "Yes; no doubt," she said. "But, you see, she cannot marry."

"I *don't* see it," returned the Doctor. "My dear madam, you must give the further management of this case over to me entirely."

But Mrs. Clive hesitated to do that, and she wanted to call in other advice. The Doctor argued and she argued; the one persuasively, the other tearfully and tremblingly. At length a compromise was effected: Dr. Zoar agreed to let the matter rest as it was for a couple of days longer, and Mrs. Clive undertook to leave it for that time in his hands.

The Doctor smiled, and rubbed his delicate fingers together softly, ran upstairs for a few moments' instruction to the nurse, then came back to take an affectionate leave, and went down the street, stepping gaily and humming an operatic air. Poor Mrs. Clive, distracted and unhappy, fell back in her rich velvet chair and indulged in a shower of tears.

IV.

BEFORE the sun had gained its meridian the next day but one, a report was circulating from one end of Spaffield to the other that pretty little Lella Clive was very much worse, almost beyond recovery.

John Pettifer and Pettifer's clerk stood talking together behind the counter in the afternoon, the latter in a state of excitement bordering upon (as John told him) mania. One moment he declared he would have Mrs. Clive and Dr. Zoar taken for conspiracy, the next that he would set fire to the house and carry off Lella bodily.

While thus engaged, and when the shop was pretty full—for Pettifer's was not only the fashionable chemist's in the place, but also the best—another customer came in: a sallow-faced, frightfully thin woman, with cold, leaden, malignant grey eyes. Looking sharply around as if in a desperate hurry, she put a prescription into the hands of Pettifer's clerk, the only individual at that moment disengaged. John Pettifer was then talking with an old gentleman, and the shopmen opposite were serving against time.

"Make this up directly," said the woman. "I'll wait for it."

A strange gleam passed over the face of Pettifer's clerk. The prescription was as legible to him as if it had been written in Chinese; but he meant to get at its meaning, for all that.

"We cannot make this prescription up immediately," said he, with the blandness of a polite shopman accustomed to wait on fashionable society. "It will require some little time."

"Then I must take it elsewhere," said the woman snappishly.

"It is from that great man, Dr. Zoar, I see," returned Pettifer's clerk, having made out the angular initials at the end, and speaking the name with reverence. "I thought the Doctor generally sent out his own medicines."

"But he has been called out of town in a hurry and hadn't time, so he scribbled the prescription and told me to get it made up at once. It is for a young lady who is in danger," returned the woman.

Pettifer's clerk seemed to reflect. "If it is wanted at once," he said, "that alters the case; particularly as Dr. Zoar is away. It is not usual to speak of these matters to anyone except doctors themselves, but the fact is Dr. Zoar, in his hurry, forgot to put down the quantity of each dose."

The leaden-eyed woman fell into the trap. "Oh, if that's all, I can tell you in a minute. She takes the little bottleful at one dose."

John Pettifer, having disposed of the old gentleman, who wanted some laudanum for toothache, now took the prescription into his hands. He understood it all. Mixing up the medicine himself, he wrapped the phial in white paper, sealed it, and handed it to the woman.

"You've not given me the prescription," said she, as she put down some money to pay. "I must take that back with me."

"When I have copied it," coolly spoke John Pettifer.

"Copied it! What do you want to copy it for?"

"We always copy our prescriptions," he quietly answered.

The woman looked doubtful and a little uneasy; her queer grey eyes glanced from him to Pettifer's clerk, and then back again. When the prescription was copied, John Pettifer cleverly put the copy into an

envelope, fastened it down and gave it to her, and she went out, not knowing that she did not carry with her the original.

"It's the queerest prescription and the ugliest that I ever made up in all my life," said John Pettifer to Pettifer's clerk.

"Would it bring on epilepsy?" was the eager question.

"Don't know what it would bring on, but I'm sure it's what a young girl ought not to take. I shall go and show it to my uncle. You can come with me. If he ——"

"If you please, sir, which is Pettifer's clerk?"

A butcher-boy in blue, shouldering an empty tray and wearing a face of enquiry, had come in and put the above question to John. John knew him, for his master was Pettifer's butcher. "What's the matter, Jacob?" he asked.

Jacob produced a letter and told his tale. He had been delivering some meat at Mrs. Clive's, when upon turning away from the door, a letter was dropped from one of the upper windows and fell into his tray. "Right slap into the tray itself, sir," said Jacob earnestly; "and when I looked at it and saw what was written on it, I thought I'd better bring it right off here at once."

The letter was addressed as follows: "Mr. Francis, Pettifer's clerk." And over the name these words were written, "Whoever picks this up, please deliver it!"

Pettifer's clerk tore the letter open, read the signature, put his hand in his pocket, and bestowed half-a-crown upon the astonished young butcher, who went up the street brandishing his tray in mad delight.

This was the letter:—

"DEAR MR. FRANCIS,—I write to you because you told me to do so, and because I seem to have no other friends, and am frightened to death. I don't know whether I shall be able to get this sent to you, for Tamarin watches me like a cat, night and day. I am shut up in my chamber and am not allowed to leave it; for fear, Tamarin says, that I might have one of my fits. Mamma is completely led by Dr. Zoar, and thinks all he says or does must be right. It is my belief that the medicine which Dr. Zoar gives me brings on these fits. I never had them before I took the medicine, and was always quite well. This is how they come on: Tamarin will suddenly look at me and say: 'Miss Eleanor, I believe another fit is threatening! Your eyes are glassy and your face is flushed:' and then she gives me one of the powders. If I object, she calls in mamma, and then I am made to take it. In about twenty minutes I begin to feel very melancholy and sad; presently my head grows dizzy, and next I am suffering horribly. I tremble all over, and I am dreadfully sick. I know nothing more than that for what appears to be hours and hours, when I wake up, feeling ill and stiff, and Tamarin says, 'Miss Eleanor, you have had another fit.'

"Please take notice of three things that I say. First: I never had anything the matter with me before I took Dr. Zoar's

stuff. Second : I have an attack which he and Tamarin call epilepsy, every time I do take it. Third : Mamma said to me last night that Dr. Zoar wanted to marry me, and she asked me whether I would consent to do so. I told her I would rather die.

"Dear Mr. Francis will you, when you read this, do something to help me to try to escape from Dr. Zoar and Tamarin ?

ELEANOR CLIVE."

"Let us go to your uncle, John," foamed Pettifer's clerk, crushing the letter into his pocket.

John went away there and then, leaving the shop to its fate and the shopmen, although it was the most busy hour of the twenty-four. Dr. Pettifer's house faced the Parade.

"Is my uncle at home ?" asked John Pettifer, when the old manservant opened the door.

"The master's out, Mr. John."

"Will he be long ? Where's he gone ?—do you know ?"

"Into the country somewhere, sir. He went off with post horses to his carriage."

It was a serious check to the impatient applicants. They decided to go in and await Dr. Pettifer's return.

It was evening, and the street lamps were lighted when the physician returned home. He had keen, handsome features, and snow-white hair. John introduced his companion by his right name, and gave a brief explanation of their business and what they wanted Dr. Pettifer to do.

"Oh, so *you* are Pettifer's clerk, are you !" said the Doctor, smiling. "Well, now, you two young men, I cannot do what you ask. I would not interfere with Zoar if you paid me to do so. As to Lella, if she has a foolish mother, I can't help it."

"Would you not interfere to save Lella's life, Uncle Charles ?"

"Save her life, boy ! You speak strongly. Show me first of all that her life is in danger."

Upon that, Pettifer's clerk took up the story. He told Dr. Pettifer what he had known of Zoar in the West Indies ; and he produced the letter, just received from Lella, and Zoar's prescription.

"Come along," cried the Doctor, all fire and fury now that he had mastered the facts. "There's no time to be lost."

Arrived at Mrs. Clive's, Dr. Pettifer walked straight through the hall, past the sitting-rooms, and up the stairs toward the chambers. The servant gazed after him.

"My mistress is in the dining-room still, sir," he said ; "and Miss Eleanor has just had another fit."

On went the Doctor ; John Pettifer and Pettifer's clerk following slowly in his wake. Dr. Pettifer had had the open prescription in his hand all the way. After a sharp knock at Lella's room door, he tried it and found it fastened.

"Open this door at once," he thundered.

The woman with the malignant grey eyes, startled and wondering, undrew the bolt and opened it an inch or two. Dr. Pettifer, who still had plenty of strength when he chose to put it forth, overpowered the woman, and pushed it open. Eleanor lay on the bed, tossing her arms wildly; her face scarlet and her eyes glazed.

"Fetch the police here; say I want them," called out Dr. Pettifer to the astonished man-servant, who had also come up.

The woman, Tamarin, knew Dr. Pettifer; she recognised the open prescription in his hand; she saw the two young men from the chemist's shop, and she probably felt that the game was up. The order to fetch the police, she did not like at all. Slipping into a small chamber close by, she caught up her bonnet and shawl and a small bag of things which belonged to her, and escaped from the house.

Probably the hardest thing in this life is for a woman to acknowledge she has been played upon. Mrs. Clive, when she came upon the scene, obstinately vowed that she would never, never believe Dr. Zoar was the villain they tried to make him out. Tamarin she did *not* like, and thought the woman might be no better than an ill-conditioned witch; but Dr. Zoar, a quack and a villainous impostor—oh, never, never!

"But he *is* one; he was no better than that in the West Indies years ago. Mrs. Clive, do pray listen to me——"

"You are Pettifer's clerk, I believe," freezingly interrupted Mrs. Clive. "I should like to ask what you do in my house? And you, John Pettifer, what are *you* here for?"

"I came with my uncle," answered John, glancing round at the doctor, who was bending over Lella. "This gentleman is not a clerk at all, but Captain Francis Colerane. Allow me to introduce him to you, Mrs. Clive: the son of Sir Thomas Colerane."

"Here, John," said the Doctor, scribbling a word on a leaf of his pocket-book—while Mrs. Clive stared at the stranger, and could not make matters out at all—"run to your place, and bring me this up with all speed. We'll soon have this poor child right again."

Lella was sinking into a troubled sleep. Dr. Pettifer, while waiting for the drug he had sent for, sat down by Mrs. Clive. He quietly related to her the whole history from beginning to end, as it had been told to him, and explained the dangerous nature of Zoar's prescription. Then Captain Colerane reported what he had known of Zoar in the West Indies. Then, while Mrs. Clive stared and sobbed, and very nearly collapsed with fright, John Pettifer came back with the antidote.

"And is it *really* not true epilepsy, Dr. Pettifer?" sighed the poor lady.

"Not a bit of it, ma'am. It is only the semblance of it—and a very good semblance, too, I must admit; might take in anybody but a medical man. Lella has no more had epilepsy than you have."

V.

WITHIN a very short time indeed, Eleanor Clive was her own bright self again, and Dr. Zoar had left the town for good. Warned, no doubt, by Tamarin, Dr. Zoar disappeared the same night. Tamarin also.

"My dear doctor," softly sighed Mrs. Clive one day, "if we are never to believe in a fascinating man like the quack Zoar, as you call him, what *are* we to believe in?"

"In common sense," answered Dr. Pettifer.

"Lella," whispered Francis Colerane a few minutes later, when they were left alone, "do *you* believe in anything?"

"I? Of course I do, Francis; in many things," answered Lella.

"Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"I don't know," stammered Lella, blushing and looking down.

"Because, my dear, I loved you from the very first moment I saw you, and I shall love you for ever."

Lella's cheeks grew hotter. She looked as though she might have confessed the same, etiquette and maiden modesty permitting.

"For ever and for ever," repeated Pettifer's clerk, with emotion.

"We will travel life's road together, my best beloved, sharing its storms and its sunshine. And I trust that no shadow will come between us; none until that last shadow which comes to all, the solemn Shadow of Death. And that, you know, may be welcomed by us, for we shall be entering the realms of Immortality."

"Oh, dear, dear!" bewailed Mrs. Clive, when enlightened as to the position of affairs, "marry Eleanor! Why, my dear Captain Colerane, it would be nearly as bad for her as the fits."

"Indeed!—how would it be so?" smiled the Captain.

"Goodness gracious! As if I could allow my only child to go off to the West Indies with any wretched fighting regiment—and live there amongst the blacks! What do you take me for, Francis Colerane?"

"Well, our regiment has come home," he said; "I came with it; and I do not any longer belong to that regiment or to any other."

"But why?"

"Because my good old father is getting fanciful; he would not have his eldest son away from him any longer, he said, and ordered me to retire; so I had to obey. I had just sold out when I came to Spafeld to look up John Pettifer. We were at school together; and a friendship took root between us, stronger and more lasting than is usually known to schoolboys. You will give me Lella, won't you, Mrs. Clive?"

"Well, under the circumstances, I—suppose I must. And—what do you say?—want to carry her off at once, to introduce her to your father and mother? Well, well, if it must be—but only for a week, mind you. Remember what trouble I have just gone through. I can't spare her longer just yet, even to Sir Thomas and Lady Colerane."

E. A.

THE GHOST OF BOLSOVER'S BANK.

By JOYCE DARRELL, AUTHOR OF "THE SAPPHIRE CROSS."

IT was one of those drenching afternoons in December, when roofs and pavements, gutters, umbrellas, and mackintoshes are transformed into so many mirrors for the reflection, more or less distinct, of lamp-rays. In such weather the rich hurry home joyfully, the poor slink miserably into sheltered corners; cabs drive a lively trade, and a railway station smiles on the travelling public like a haven of refuge on a storm-tossed mariner.

Into the six o'clock express for Barminster (a sweet and dreamy, old-fashioned, yet prosperous town on the Great Western line) two gentlemen leapt, almost as the train started. They were old acquaintances, formerly fellow-townsmen, and were glad to do the two hours' journey together.

One of them, as he settled down, gave a slight start and cast a glance of surprise towards a man seated in the corner farthest from himself. A shrunken, forlorn enough figure, clothed in a long grey ulster, and wearing a soft felt hat, which quite shaded the upper portion of his face, while the lower was disguised by a long iron-grey beard. Still there was nothing so very remarkable in his appearance as to explain the look, curiously compounded as that was of amazement and an odd sort of fear. The expression vanished in an instant, but nevertheless the feeling which had called it forth must have remained, for the gentleman gave a strangely nervous and misplaced little laugh when his friend abruptly said:

"So poor Bolsover's funeral is to be to-morrow!"

"Yes. You are going down for it, I suppose, Feilding?"

"Of course. They have sent me an invitation. The death was sudden, was it not, Gerridge?"

Mr. Gerridge nodded. He glanced towards the silent third passenger, who had shifted his position slightly, and was apparently dropping off to sleep.

"Strange fellow, poor Henry Bolsover!" resumed Mr. Feilding.

"There's something extraordinary about his will, I hear."

"Extraordinary? You may well say so—at any rate as far as one of the bequests is concerned. In point of fact he has ordered £5,000 to be paid to himself."

"To himself?"

"Well, it amounts to that. £5,000 has to be put into his coffin. I suppose, if they do it at all, they'll put in a cheque, and meet the absurd clause in that way."

"How very strange!"

"For years past we have thought Bolsover a little queer. His odd, moody ways and his unsociability, and his peculiar style of dress, always like some artist-fellow, or——" The speaker broke off suddenly, and again glanced at the slumbering occupant of the distant corner seat.

"He was a bright enough fellow when we were young and I lived at Barminster," resumed the other. "He and his cousin, Ned Haviland, what bucks they were! So much alike in person too,—both handsome fellows, and rivals in every woman's favour."

"Ah, poor Ned! He died miserably, I fear," said Mr. Gerridge. "Wildness was in his blood. But I have often wondered whether, if old George Bolsover had been kinder about that money, or his son Henry, now lying dead, had shown himself more grateful to the kinsman who saved his life, Ned might not have made a better thing of his existence."

"It wasn't in old George to be kind. He was harder than his son, and that's saying a good deal. The present young fellow, Arthur, seems different, I believe."

"Yes. Arthur feels his father's death grievously—more than one could believe, considering how he has been treated. By the way, Littlejohn, the cashier, has not been told of Bolsover's death yet."

"You don't mean it! Why?"

"He has been ill—invalided for a month past—disease of the heart, and the doctors say any sudden shock might kill him. On the other hand he has been fretting terribly to get back to the bank, and is to return there in a day or two, and then, by degrees, the news is to be broken to him. Littlejohn worshipped his master."

"Well, it seems a queer affair altogether. How long have you been in London, Gerridge?"

"Only since yesterday. Had to run up for a little business."

When the train stopped at last at Barminster the two gentlemen were recognised by the porters and the station-master; the latter coming forward with a special greeting for him who was now nearly a stranger to it, Mr. Feilding.

"I hope you are well, sir? Bad weather; but the rain was wanted. Good evening, Mr. Gerridge: is this your bag? Anything else in the carriage?"

"Only another passenger, who seems asleep. By Jove! he's gone—slipt away like a ghost while we turned to speak to you," said Mr. Gerridge.

"Was he a gentleman of the town?" asked the station-master.

"Well, no—I hardly think so, unless ——" Mr. Gerridge did not finish his sentence, but smiled to himself, and half muttered—"Lucky I'm not superstitious! Good night, Jelf."

"Mr. Feilding has come down for the funeral to-morrow," remarked the station-master a few moments later to one of his subordinates.

"I could have sworn I saw Mr. Bolsover himself just now," re-

turned the ticket collector. "A man passed me his very image. It gave me quite a turn."

"More simple you!" said the station-master. "Mr. Bolsover is gone on his last journey, the bourne from which no traveller returns."

II.

At the late Mr. Bolsover's own house a mournful party sat down to dinner. The lawyer, Foljambe, had arrived, and one or two other guests—relatives of the family; they all were very grave, of course; and as for Arthur Bolsover himself, the only son and head of the house now, he was genuinely grieved. It did him credit that he should feel so much the loss of a father whose death set him free from a galling, sometimes even a cruel, bondage.

For his father had been the strangest, the gloomiest, in some respects the most tyrannical, of men. He was devoted to the bank, being a hard, keen man of business, and loving such money as he had for the sake of getting more. He unbent to no man, unless, indeed, on rare occasions to the cashier Littlejohn, who was a sort of pale reflection of himself in every way, and who entertained for his chief an instinctive, dog-like affection, into which terror entered as largely as respect.

The late Henry Bolsover would allow no partner in his bank, and accorded even to Arthur only the position of a clerk. He kept the young man miserably short of money; never confided any plans to him; and repelled all advances by his icy reserve. Yet Arthur felt a strange kind of pity for him, suspecting that he was not happy, and longing to penetrate the enigma of the inscrutable, stern, perhaps self-tortured nature. But he never could draw any closer to his father in spite of all his efforts. Of late, indeed, the breach between them had rather widened, for Mr. Bolsover wished Arthur to marry his cousin, Miss Martha Paunceford, who was something of an heiress, and Arthur had other views.

Miss Martha Paunceford was not at table. She was upstairs, keeping company with Mrs. Bolsover, who was arrayed in a lavish amount of new crape, and plunged in the deepest woe. Poor woman! Her married life had been anything but a bed of roses; but she liked being miserable, and enjoyed doing everything according to some standard of respectability that she had set up for herself. And having now so excellent a reason for ceremonial grief, she would not have suppressed one tear, or abated the tenth of an inch from the black border of her new pocket-handkerchiefs, for the world.

So she sat in her own room, shrouded in bombazine and semi-darkness; and Martha sat by her with an air of acid watchfulness, intended to repel all attempts at consolation on the part of a frivolous, outside world. This bank residence was commodious and handsome, the business premises being in front, the dwelling-rooms looking on to a large garden.

"Is dinner over, Martha?" presently asked poor Mrs. Bolsover, after a fresh outburst of sobs.

"I will see, dear aunt," said the young lady. "Yes; the gentlemen are at their wine," she reported on her return.

"How they can drink it!" exclaimed the widow, and fell to weeping again.

"Men will do anything," said Martha.

"And the time getting on! Send Porter to te-tell Greaves that I must sp-speak to Arthur."

"Yes, dear aunt."

And Porter, who was the maid, having duly communicated with Greaves, who was the butler, Arthur, in the course of a few minutes appeared.

His mother, naturally, began to sob with loudness the instant he entered the room, that being the way in which she had received everybody for four days past. Arthur, his handsome young face looking pale and grief-worn, sat down beside her, and waited in patient silence for her tears to expend themselves.

"What have you decided to do?" quavered Mrs. Bolsover at last.

"We are as much puzzled as ever, mother. Foljambe thinks we can disregard the clause altogether."

"Disregard? Not with my consent, Arthur. Nobody shall ever say that I disobeyed a single injunction of your poor dear father's."

"But, mother, this particular injunction is so preposterous."

"I am surprised at you, Arthur. Preposterous is not a word you should use on this solemn occasion. Your dear father wished the money to be put in his coffin, and it shall be done."

"But how?" cried Arthur, adding with a sort of mournful humour, "Am I to write a cheque and put it there?"

"Write a cheque by all means if that be sufficient," replied Mrs. Bolsover, with dignity. "I don't profess to understand business-matters. I never did. I have always considered such things to lie outside the sphere of woman. But where my conscience or heart is concerned, my instinct does not err. And although of course I am nobody now that your dear father has been called away from me, still, wherever my weak voice can be raised in support of his wishes, I hope to make it heard. Mr. Foljambe may say this or that, and anyone whose judgment you prefer before mine may say the other, but I, as your surviving parent, feel it my duty to maintain that the money should be paid."

Arthur drew a cheque book from his pocket. He had not long been in possession of any object so important; but a few days before his death Mr. Bolsover, albeit sorely against the grain, had been forced to confer on his son the power to sign.

With a melancholy smile he wrote the cheque for £5,000 in favour of Henry Bolsover, not substituting "order" for "bearer" as he generally did, but letting the latter printed word stand. Then he handed

it to his mother, saying rather wearily : " Will you put it in yourself ? The lid should be nailed down in an hour from now."

Renewed sobs ; then Mrs. Bolsover began again : " Certainly, I will put it in, Arthur. I cannot conceive that any hands have a better right than mine to touch your dear father. It is a painful duty—the whole of this discussion, indeed, has been deeply painful. But now that I have triumphed, as right must always triumph, it shall not be said that I faltered at the eleventh hour through any yielding even to my natural grief."

And with her handkerchief pressed once more to her eyes, and with Martha preceding her, she swept slowly from the room. Arthur did not follow her. The whole proceeding connected with the cheque seemed to him a mockery.

The room in which the coffin was placed had been Mr. Bolsover's dressing-room. Things, by his widow's wish, had been left exactly as they were on the evening when, while dressing for dinner, he had been seized with his brief and fatal illness. Even the watch and a ring which he always wore lay upon the toilet-table. Some perverse notion of reverence—a quaint, superstitious feeling—made Mrs. Bolsover's desire that they should so remain until he was fairly gone ; then she intended herself to collect and put away everything.

The coffin was placed in front of a large bow-window—rather an anomaly in a dressing-room—but the house was an old one, and full of anomalies. Across this, thick red curtains were closely drawn. A fire burned in the grate, a lamp dimly lighted was on the table. The atmosphere of the room was heavy with the scent of the flowers which, in beautiful profusion, covered all but the stern face of the dead. Sometimes the departing soul leaves on the countenance a smile, a look that is as a message by which the living may gain of the vanished one some fuller, more loving comprehension than ever before. But the face of Henry Bolsover had been impenetrable, living : it remained impenetrable, dead.

Mrs. Bolsover approached, lifted some of the blossoms covering the crossed hands, laid the cheque there, replaced the flowers, and turned away.

" We are to stay, I think you said ?" observed Martha.

" I stay, of course, Martha."

Then she buried her face and sat down by the fire, while Martha went to the open door and held whispered parley with some of the servants in the corridor.

" What a draught comes from that window ! It actually stirs those heavy curtains," she remarked, with a shiver, as she returned and her self approached the welcome blaze.

Two or three men presently entered. The coffin was nailed down ; and, when the dreary office was quite completed, Mrs. Bolsover suffered her niece to lead her away.

A few hours later, guests and servants in the silent house had retired to bed and were sleeping soundly.

Mrs. Bolsover, poor thing, after weeping herself into a condition of nervous exhaustion, had dropped into uneasy slumber. It was broken by strange dreams.

In their respective rooms Miss Martha Paunceford and Arthur Bolsover still sat by the fire, lost in thought. The death of the head of the house affected the destiny of each. Both were now set free to go their own way and please themselves : a contingency simply undreamed of as long as the tyrannical rule of Mr. Bolsover had lasted.

Miss Paunceford had been his ward, enjoying hitherto but a very slender income. She was not to come into the bulk of her property until her thirtieth year, to which she was now close. Mr. Bolsover had been at no pains to conceal that he should like her to marry Arthur.

The young man, however, showed no eagerness to meet these views ; and Miss Paunceford (who, when she had nothing else to be proud of, had piqued herself on common sense) possibly disgusted at her cousin's coldness, had done a very foolish thing. She had clandestinely engaged herself to the greatest ne'er-do-weel in Barminster, and met him in secret with the zest of seventeen.

She had seen him this very afternoon. He had stolen in the dusk through the shrubbery and the garden to hold stolen converse with her at the deserted study-window.

They had been disturbed by approaching footsteps, and Miss Paunceford had fled, as she now remembered, without shutting the window. She began drowsily to wonder whether anyone had shut it later—whether she should go down to see ; and while thus wondering she dropped asleep in her chair.

Arthur Bolsover had other thoughts ; yet they also ended in a love reverie. He had been looking over letters and papers of a date long past, and they had revealed to his knowledge many things which before he had only guessed at. Very present to his mind was poor Ned Haviland, that cousin of his father's, once so bright and happy, who had suddenly left Barminster to plunge into the seething struggle, the vice and misery of London : only to be heard of again years afterwards, when a paragraph in a newspaper stated that he had been picked up from under the wheels of a cab, and carried, maimed and wounded, to a hospital.

Arthur recollected this circumstance and the stir which it made in Barminster, where Haviland was still pityingly remembered by some of the friends of his youth. These had come forward and made up a sum of money, which they sent to the injured man ; only, however, to have it returned to them by one of the officials of the hospital, who stated that "Mr. Haviland refused to accept it."

Mr. Bolsover had been bitterly censured for refusing to subscribe one penny to this little fund, and Arthur, though only a boy at the

time, could recall the look of gloom and hatred that came into his father's eyes whenever Ned's name was mentioned. A little later some person of more benevolence than discretion had inquired of Mr. Bolsover for news of Haviland, and been curtly answered that he was dead. All this, and more, Arthur revolved in sorrow and shame, for within the past hour he had learnt beyond the possibility of doubting that his father had behaved towards his kinsman with a black and base ingratitude. Had he felt remorse? Arthur wondered. Was it the memory of a great service which he had never rewarded that had cast such a shadow over his later years; made him so silent and reserved; haunted him always like a spectre of the past, and explained, perhaps, some of the eccentricities which for years before his death were rapidly gaining for him the reputation of semi-madness?

Oh! for one moment in which to speak to the dead—to lift the veil that shrouded that inscrutable, silent mind; to penetrate the secret of its struggles; perhaps, with wider comprehension, to feel able to pity and forgive! Vain longing! felt through countless generations by the side of every grave, and destined thus to be felt to the end.

Arthur roused himself with a sigh. All at once some softer thought came into his mind, and brought a tender smile to his lips. He put his hand into his breast-pocket and drew out the portrait of a young girl—a lovely, wistful little face, that looked at him with sweet, confiding eyes.

"My darling," murmured Arthur, "our sad days are over now. No more hardship—no more toil." And then he turned back to the old letters.

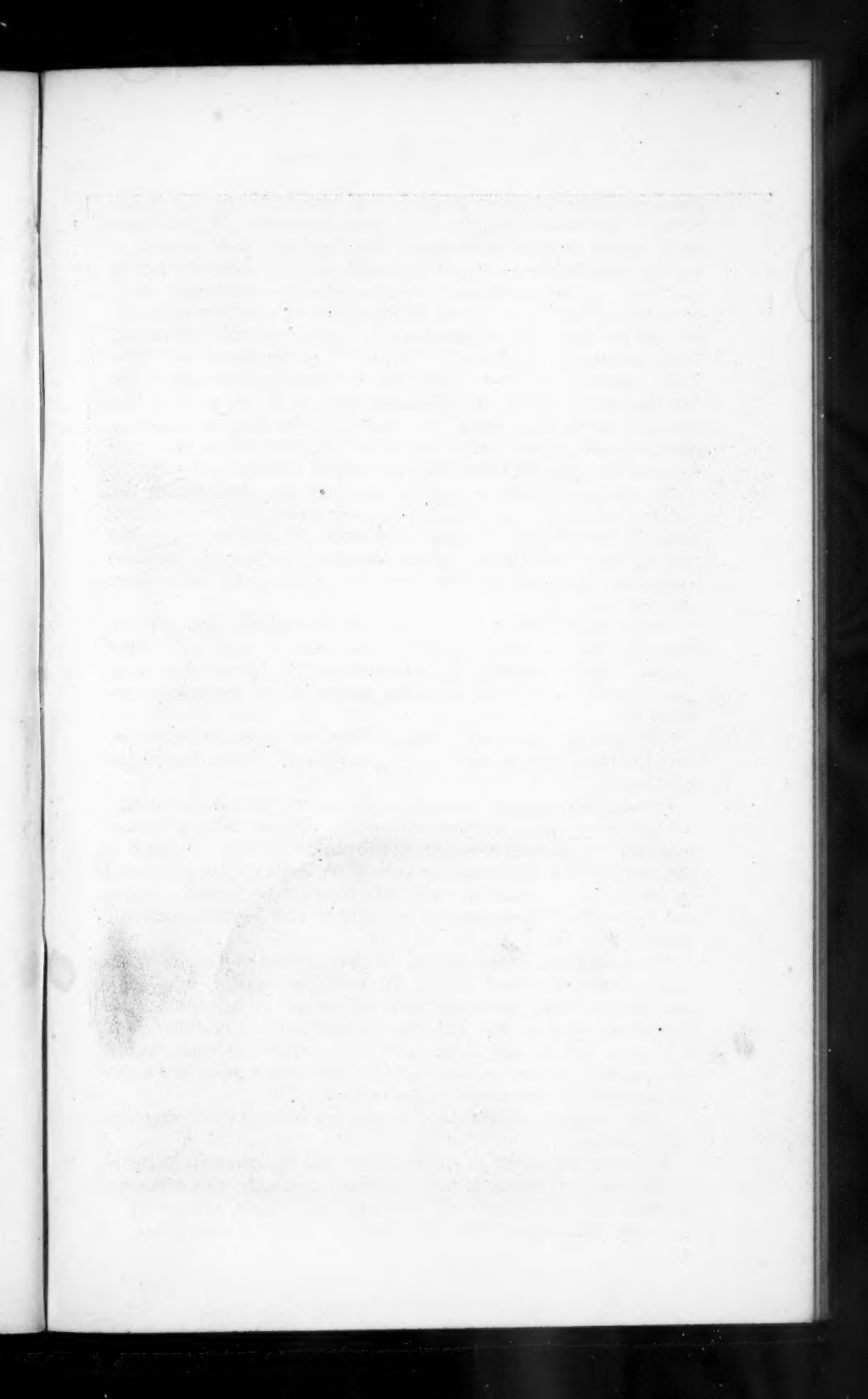
He was interrupted by a shriek—a cry of wildest terror, that rang through every corner of the silent house. Arthur thought it came from near his mother's room, on the floor below his own. To rush to the door and downstairs was the work of an instant. He was joined on his way by Martha—no whit less scared than himself. Above and below doors were opening and guests and servants alarmedly peering.

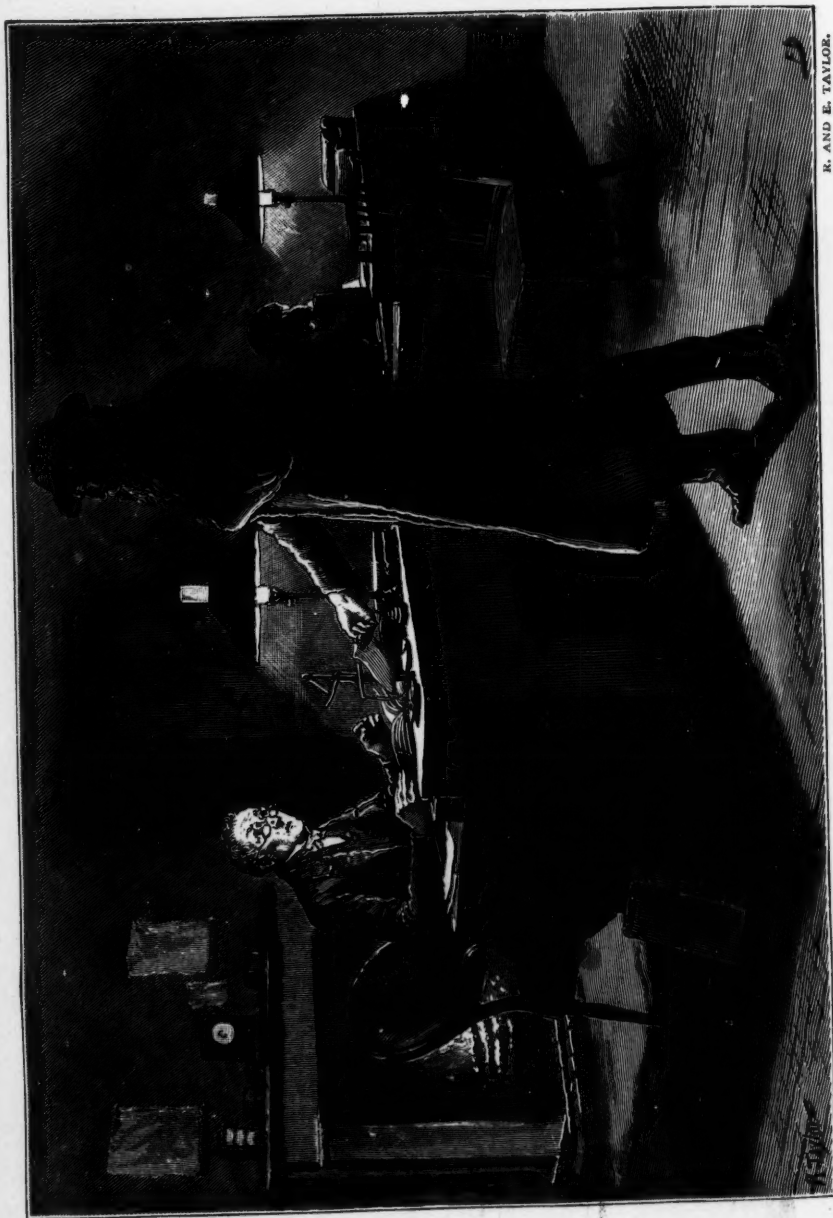
On the long and broad landing in front of her own bedroom—a landing fitfully illumined only by the waning moon as it emerged at intervals from heavy banks of clouds and poured its light through one unshuttered window, Mrs. Bolsover was stretched in a deathlike faint. They lifted her and carried her to the bed—chafed her hands, bathed her temples. At last she unclosed her eyes, looked about her wildly and gasped: "Where is he? Has he spoken?"

"He? Who? My dear mother, what has alarmed you?" enquired Arthur tenderly.

Her trembling hands closed round his, and she answered hoarsely:

"It was your father, Arthur. I awoke suddenly with a strange feeling of alarm. I felt I could not be longer alone, and got up to go to Martha's room. As I reached this door I saw your father. I





R. AND E. TAYLOR.

FRANK DADD.

SUDDENLY THE FIGURE STRETCHED OUT ITS THIN WHITE HAND, ADORNED WITH THE CORNELIAN RING.

saw him leave the dressing-room and go downstairs in the direction of his study ——”

She stopped shudderingly, and several of her hearers drew together with looks and words of alarm. Every morning Mr. Bolsover had risen at dawn to go to his study: and there was not one member of his household but could realize with terrifying vividness the scene described by the widow.

“It was a dream,” said Arthur, soothingly.

“Or a burglar, perhaps,” suggested the practical voice of Mr. Foljambe from the doorway. “I should search the house.”

Miss Paunceford glided swiftly away. She recollected the window left open by herself in the study, and was anxious to close it before the butler should arrive and have his reminiscences aroused or ideas stirred up. If he really had seen her talking to a man, and happened to mention it, an awkward cross-examination would be the result, and her reputation for common-sense be rudely and prematurely destroyed.

The window *was* open: she hastily and softly shut it; then met the others at the door and said carelessly: “There is no sign of disturbance here.”

Nor was there anywhere, although the house was searched from top to bottom. The dressing-room itself was examined; the coffin was undisturbed; and of all the objects of value scattered on the toilet-table but one was found missing—namely, a curious old cornelian ring that Mr. Bolsover had worn always.

“No burglar would take that and leave the rest, so it has doubtless rolled away somewhere,” said Mr. Foljambe, who by this time had adopted Arthur's idea of a dream, and was anxious to return to his warm bed. But Mrs. Bolsover maintained that it was no dream—that she had seen the spirit of her dead husband. She was not left alone again that night.

The next day the funeral was celebrated with befitting state, and on the following morning Bolsover's bank, closed the day of the funeral, opened its doors again to the public.

Arthur went down early, signed a few letters, transacted some necessary business; and hurried away at ten o'clock, partly because he had urgent need to go to London, partly because he wished to avoid Mr. Littlejohn, the cashier, who, after a month's illness, was returning later that morning to the bank.

“You must put off the poor old fellow with as plausible a story as you can,” said the young man to his chief clerk. “The news of my father's death must be broken to him by degrees. He will see the cheques signed by me of course—so just say that my father has been ailing. And do caution all the clerks not to let the truth slip out suddenly, for the shock might kill Littlejohn, with his weak heart. It is his having been away at the time that will try him.”

Arthur departed. Shortly afterwards Mr. Littlejohn appeared—a small, wizened, punctilious little man, looking tinier and dryer than

ever after his late illness. He had not many ideas—his mind being mostly furnished with ledgers—but he had one creed, one faith, and one religion, and that was an unconquerable devotion to Mr. Bolsover.

He was afraid of him, of course, as everybody had been, but anything so blasphemous as disapproval of his master never crossed Mr. Littlejohn's mind. In a feeble way he imitated his chief, glaring as sternly as he could at the clerks, talking to them about nothing but business, and never asking them a question if it could possibly be avoided.

They watched him with curiosity on this morning when he returned to the Bank, and after the manner of their kind, took a certain grim pleasure in his glance of surprise at not seeing Mr. Bolsover, and his start of amazement at recognising Arthur's signature on the cheques.

"The governor's away," said the youngest and most flippant of the clerks. "Has left Mr. Arthur in charge. Gone off on unavoidable business, I should say."

Mr. Littlejohn cleared his throat a little nervously. He was very much astonished, but would have died just then rather than ask a question; and was so much bent on concealing his own feelings that he failed to note the ghoul-like amusement depicted on the countenances of the clerks.

He worked in his routine fashion all day, but was strangely put out by the absence of his master, and what with that and his recent illness, he felt weak in the head and confused. He sat in his own den—next the master's private room, and his only companion was the youngest of his subordinates, Mr. Capper: the youth who had communicated to him the news of the "Governor's" absence. The other clerks were in the big middle room, where they waylaid all customers and impressed on these that the cashier was to hear no word as yet of the death of Mr. Bolsover.

In fact they kept business from him as much as they could; which was fortunate for Mr. Littlejohn, as otherwise he never could have remained at his post to the end. For he felt with humiliation that he was far feebler than he thought. His head was buzzing—his heart gave little warning knocks at intervals, and his eyes were even dimmer than usual. At all times he had wretched sight, being obliged to wear one sort of glasses for writing and another sort for seeing anyone half a yard off.

The day was horribly dark and dreary, and the gas had to be lighted at three o'clock, but still Mr. Littlejohn plodded on, blinking at his figures and adding them up, while secretly, half unconsciously wearying all the time for the sight of his chief's stern face. He did not—although quite unaware of relaxing in any way—keep nearly as sharp a look out as usual over the clerks; and Mr. Capper for one took advantage of this to sit with his back turned to the old fellow, and became absorbed in the pages of a very amusing novel.

Half-past four. Mr. Littlejohn cleared his throat again. He could hold out no longer : he must ask one question.

"Will Mr. Bolsover soon be home, do you know?"

"Eh ! what? home? Oh ! to-night or to-morrow, I believe," airily responded Mr. Capper, who had not the faintest idea of what he had been asked.

Fresh silence ensued, broken only by the faint scratching of Mr. Littlejohn's pen—the furtive turning of the leaves of Mr. Capper's book.

"To-night or to-morrow morning." Then the next day Mr. Bolsover would be at the Bank. This was the cashier's thought, and he felt strangely glad ; his heart even beat a little quicker.

Over the desk where he sat, as over that occupied by Mr. Capper, a lamp covered by a large green shade made a wide circle of light, but the rest of the room was in semi-darkness, and no point was so obscure as the door which led into the principal's private room. All at once Mr Littlejohn heard a sound there—a familiar slight creaking of the hinges, and looking up quickly, and peering into the shadow, he beheld a well-known tall figure, with a long grey beard and a soft felt hat pulled low over its brows ; the figure of his master.

"Mr. Bolsover ! I am glad to see you, sir," said the little cashier, his voice quivering with eagerness and almost soundless ; somewhat breathless too from the quickened beating of his heart. He half rose but had to sit down again quickly, for his head swam and his sight felt more dim than ever.

It did not strike him as at all strange that Mr. Bolsover made no reply, for he was a silent man at the best of times. Besides, he might have answered, only Mr. Littlejohn could not hear very well just then because of the surging in his ears.

Silently the figure stretched out its thin white hand, adorned with the cornelian ring, and laid a cheque on the desk in front of Mr. Littlejohn : then drew back some paces into the shadow, as though annoyed by the glare of the lamp, a thing not to be wondered at when you have just emerged from darkness.

Mr. Littlejohn made out the amount of the cheque, which was drawn and signed by Arthur, and at first was surprised at its magnitude—£5,000. On reflection, however, he felt confirmed in a suspicion that had crossed his mind several times that day—namely, that Mr. Bolsover had gone away on business connected with some investment. Mr. Littlejohn even fancied he knew what it was, and thought £5,000 a very well-chosen sum for the purpose.

To get the bundle of notes out of the iron safe was the work only of a few moments, and Mr. Littlejohn, returning to his desk, counted them out before his master, the latter standing motionless all the time, except for a nervous movement of one hand. With the thumb he kept moving the cornelian ring on the little finger backward and forward until at last the ring flew off, alighted on the desk, rebounded from thence and fell to the ground.

Mr. Littlejohn—although to do so made his head much worse—stooped to pick the ring up—fumbled about after it for a moment—found it and, on looking up to restore it to the owner, discovered that the figure with the grey beard and the soft felt hat had vanished as noiselessly as it had come. But it had carried the notes away with it. Mr. Capper at the same moment having finished a particularly thrilling chapter, became aware that something unusual had been going forward, and looked round with his ordinary happy insouciance. But he saw nothing except that poor old Littlejohn, very pale, was sitting with his head supported by his hand, and holding out a cornelian ring, which gave Mr. Capper an odd little start when he recognized it.

"I—I don't feel very well," said the cashier. "Will you please take this ring back to Mr. Bolsover."

Mr. Capper stared. Was the poor old man raving? "Mr. Bolsover?" he uttered.

"Yes," said Littlejohn dreamily, for everything in the room was beginning to dance before his eyes. "He was here this moment, getting a cheque cashed."

"My goodness!" ejaculated Mr. Capper, starting from his stool, and then standing speechless, his eyes dilating, and beads standing on his forehead. "It couldn't have been Bolsover." Littlejohn looked at him with some impatience.

"Is it so strange," he said icily, "that Mr. Bolsover should come in to his own bank, and cash a cheque?"

This was too much for Capper. Surprise and terror robbed him of prudence. He could not stand there and listen to such ghastly nonsense.

"That's good!" he exclaimed ironically. "Strange? Uncommonly strange, I should say, as the governor was buried yesterday."

Mr. Littlejohn seemed to gather himself up with one great effort as he listened. He rose slowly to his feet: fixed eyes of mad, beseeching anguish on the eager young face before him, then gave a stifled cry, threw his hands out despairingly, and dropped to the floor.

The news of his master's death had killed him!

III.

WHAT excitement reigned in the bank, and later in Barminster! When Mr. Capper, pale as a sheet, stuttered out the tale to his fellow clerks in the next room and the few customers present, they thought at first he had gone mad. But there, on poor old Littlejohn's desk, lay the cheque of which all had heard, and the cornelian ring which all recognised.

The very fact of Mr. Capper himself having been in the same room with the apparition and yet hearing and perceiving nothing seemed another supernatural element in the strange and incredible story.

Like wildfire the news spread. Added to what had been seen by Mrs. Bolsover, it was supernaturally strange. Then Mr. Gerridge, although half incredulous, came forward to say he had seen the ghost in the train. And the ticket-collector swore to it also, and a cow-boy declared that in the grey dawn he had met the late Mr. Bolsover striding across the fields that led to another railway station, and had been so frightened that he ran miles away. Lovers of the supernatural, who were just as numerous in Warminster as elsewhere, had a rare harvest. Arthur was telegraphed for from London, and arrived with all speed, looking very grave and stern.

Of course, there were some minds which inclined to a natural explanation, and desiring that Arthur should put the matter in the hands of the police. Among these was Mr. Feilding, who was remaining in the town for a few days. "I saw no ghost in the railway carriage," he said. "In fact I hardly remember that there was anybody but Gerridge and myself there. But of course I take his word for there having been a man present who wore a felt hat and had a long beard and (unfortunately) must have heard our conversation. That young fool, Capper, admits now that he was reading a novel which absorbed all his attention at the time the cheque was cashed: and as for poor old Littlejohn, we all know he was half blind. The evidence of the ticket-collector and the cow-boy, if it be worth anything at all, carries out the idea that somebody was personating your father. Under these circumstances, my dear Bolsover, I cannot conceive why you do not take measures to have the offender discovered if possible."

Arthur seemed unwilling to answer, but at last said reluctantly: "There is so much that is mysterious in the business. When can the cheque have been abstracted? From the moment that she herself laid it on my father's hands until the lid of the coffin was nailed down, my mother never left the room."

"The cheque cashed by Littlejohn may have been forged," said Mr. Feilding.

"No. It was the same cheque," said Arthur.

"Humph!" said Mr. Feilding, for the first time rather staggered. "So you believe in the ghost?"

But to this Arthur made no reply, and his visitor put an end to the conversation.

"That young Bolsover has some reason for his conduct," he said later to Mr. Gerridge. "There positively are moments when I think he got the cheque cashed himself."

"Impossible," said Mr. Gerridge. "I have been talking about it to Miss Paunceford, who says that nobody but herself and her aunt was present when the cheque was put in the coffin, and they saw the lid nailed down almost immediately afterwards."

"Without quitting the room in the interval?"

"Yes."

And out of this circle there was no getting, though the whole town talked and talked and started every possible theory, one more extraordinary and fantastic than the other.

Meanwhile Arthur Bolsover went quietly about his usual avocations, apparently resigned himself to the loss of the £5,000, and in a short time took another journey to London.

IV.

A LITTLE room in London. To enter it seemed at first like a glimpse of enchantment, so striking was the contrast which it made with the squalor and the dreariness of the dripping streets.

For the only tenant of the room was a young girl—pale, sad-looking, but exquisitely pretty—who was busily engaged binding into garlands and sprays a wealth of lovely hot-house blossoms which lay heaped on wet moss in front of her. The Parma violets, the roses, tuberoses and japonicas made a glory of fragrance and colour in the lowly room. Lowly it was, yet pretty also, as far as neatness and taste and care can redeem a too evident poverty. A bright fire burned in the tiny grate; and curled up in the centre of the hearthrug lay a lordly Persian cat—a superb creature, which seemed to be condescendingly making the best of its humble surroundings.

The last wreath was finished, and the young girl had just murmured to herself: "Now I wonder if the boy will let them fade before he fetches them"—when the sound of a step on the stairs brought a vivid colour to her cheeks and a look of breathless expectation to her eyes.

A knock at the door. She flew towards it, but had hardly time to cry "Come in" when it opened to admit Arthur Bolsover.

"You!" she cried in surprise, yet with unspeakable gladness. He drew her towards him and kissed her before he answered.

"I saw no reason why I should not present myself here boldly now. I am tired of waiting round corners to catch a fugitive glimpse of you, Ruth. Besides, I wished to speak frankly at last to your father."

"He is still away," she said, sorrowfully.

A curious expression crossed Arthur's face; but instead of replying to her observation he looked at the flowers and said lightly:

"Why, what is this? Has Hafiz been whisked off in the night in the lap of some witch mounted on a broomstick, and did he bring you all these treasures from his native land of the sun?"

"No. The explanation is more prosaic. Some florists at the West End recognised a talent for mounting flowers in your humble servant; and they pay me rather handsomely for a delightful occupation."

"Rather handsomely! Sixpence an hour, I suppose, and you toil at these all the evening, after running about to teach all day. Well, thank heaven those days are over, Ruth," Arthur said fervently.

"Over?" repeated Ruth dreamily. "You mean that you are free now: but there is still my father's consent to win."

"And you think he will hate me always because I am my father's son? Poor old man! I have discovered to my sorrow and my shame that he had better cause for his enmity than I ever before guessed," said Arthur sadly.

He drew her to a seat near the fire and sat down beside her, holding her little hand in his, and caressing it softly while he spoke:

"You know the sad story in part, Ruth, my darling, although you have been too kind and generous ever to tell it to me. When I tried to argue that your father's hatred of mine was perhaps exaggerated and misplaced you never contradicted me. But now I have learnt the truth. I know that in their childhood and early youth our fathers loved one another like brothers, and that once when at school my father's life was saved by the courage and devotion of yours. This service should never have been forgotten, whatever happened in after years; but, alas! when the two young men were grown up, jealousy came between them, for they both loved the same woman, and their friendship was changed to enmity. All this you know probably; and also that the Havilands, being as wild and extravagant as the Bolsovers were hard and close-fisted, the latter, through a succession of mortgages, became possessed of all their kinsman's land. My grandfather foreclosed at last, and then by a strange, unlucky chance, within a very few hours after the transfer of the property, a lead mine was discovered on the Haviland property, which—had he only known of it sooner—would have enabled your grandfather to pay the mortgage three times over."

"All this I have heard," interposed Ruth softly. "I know, too, that as soon as he learnt the existence of the mine, my grandfather entreated old George Bolsover to give him at least £5,000, and this prayer was denied. But these things are past now, Arthur. What do these dead-and-gone enmities matter to you and to me?"

"I should like to tell you everything," said Arthur. "It seems to me a kind of expiation to do so. My father remained deaf to their claims, Ruth, but I do believe that remorse for his own ingratitude embittered his after life. During the closing months of his existence he was stern and silent, inscrutable to the strangest degree. I have told you already of the singular clause in his will. The sum he named—£5,000—strikes me as suggested to him by the memory of the appeal which he had once so cruelly spurned. Heaven knows what strange, distorted form the idea may have taken in his warped and failing brain; but he may have thought that by ordering the sum to be buried with him, and thus sterilising it, he would remove some curse that might otherwise have clung to his descendants."

"No curse would ever have clung to you," said Ruth.

Arthur bent his head with a kind of passionate humility. "Then you forgive us?" he said. "You forgive your father's wasted life and your own youth of toil and privation?"

"We shall never have to forgive, but always to love one another, I hope," she answered tenderly. "But my poor father! Is it not strange how the idea of wringing those miserable £5,000 out of his old enemy seemed to have taken possession of him just during the last few weeks? I tried to dissuade him from going to Barminster, when he heard of the death, but my prayers were of no use. I longed to tell him of you, Arthur, and to promise in your name that one day all the wrong should be righted. Perhaps now, when he comes back and sees you, and is told everything, we may persuade him to bury his hatred in your father's grave."

"God grant it!" said the young man. But his face wore a troubled look; and he added, almost as if speaking to himself: "I wish he were at home again!"

"And I!" cried Ruth. "Think how I wish it! All these lonely evenings I have been wearying for him as I sat here with no company but Hafiz, while working at my flowers."

"Tell me," said Arthur, "did your father mean to go anywhere but to Barminster?"

She shook her head sorrowfully. "He had barely money enough even for that one journey, more especially as by a curious freak he chose to go first-class; I accompanied him to the train. I cannot think why he does not return. And he must be absolutely in want of food, unless ——" She stopped abruptly, turning a little pale, and the tone of her last words changed to a cadence of pain.

"My dear, do not think of that," said Arthur, soothingly. But the fear which had occurred to her found an echo in his own heart.

For poor Ned Haviland had of late years sought a refuge in opium-eating from the ills of poverty and helplessness and the agony of an incurable disease; and when the craving took him, which was only at intervals, he would leave his home and remain in hiding somewhere for days. He had been better during the last few months, and Ruth had been happier about him. While patient and courageous and loving always, she had never known what it was to be positively happy until the day when a strange chance led to her meeting Arthur Bolsover at the house of one of her pupils.

He had been struck by her name, and was interested in her for her beauty and her charm. Then began the little idyl which for a whole year had secretly brightened both their lives. Ruth dared as little speak of him to her father as Arthur ventured to hint at *her* existence to Mr. Bolsover: but they met in secret when they could: they were both young, and they felt they could afford to wait.

"There he is!" suddenly cried Ruth, springing up, her quick ear having again caught the sound of a step on the stairs.

The footfall stumbled. She gave a scared look, and rushing to the door threw it open. On the threshold, gaunt, and spectral-looking from want of food and mental struggle, stood Haviland; and Arthur, although prepared for the resemblance, could not help starting at

the extraordinary although superficial likeness between him and his father.

They were of the same height and build, and wore the same long iron-grey beard ; while the resemblance was strangely heightened by an accidental similarity of costume. The shabby ulster and soft felt hat were natural enough garments for poor Ned Haviland to wear, although they had seemed oddly out of place in Barminster when worn by the rich Mr. Bolsover.

"You are ill, papa," said Ruth, tenderly, while her anxious eyes scanned his haggard face. "Sit down ; and see—here is a friend."

Arthur moved forward, but no sooner did Haviland look at him than he shrank backwards with a gesture of terror. Doubtless he had caught sight of Arthur at Barminster, and now recognised him.

"The money was mine—mine by right !" he cried out hoarsely, in tones of mingled alarm and rage. "I could not wrest it from him living : I took it from him, dead : and I did it—for her !"

With a movement of yearning appeal he indicated Ruth, then swaying suddenly forward, he fainted.

"Oh, what does it all mean ?" cried Ruth, terrified, as she sank on her knees beside the insensible form.

"Hush ! it means nothing that you need fear, Ruth," said Arthur ; and, gathering the poor, thin form in his strong arms, he laid it gently on a couch.

Medical aid was brought, and the best of nourishment administered. But Haviland, although he lingered for some days, never rallied or recovered enough consciousness even to recognise his daughter.

She found the bank-notes on him, and dimly guessing what she feared to express, she would have given them to Arthur. But he said, gently : "They are yours, Ruth. Do not ask any questions now. Later you shall know as much as I can tell you."

For of course the actual details of the theft : the moment in which the idea of it took form in Haviland's weakened brain : the precise manner in which he executed it ; were a mystery still and have so remained to this day. The probability was that, hearing the curious proviso mentioned in the railway carriage, he had entered the house stealthily, was hidden behind the heavy curtains when Mrs. Bolsover placed the cheque in the coffin, and at once took it out, and made good his escape later.

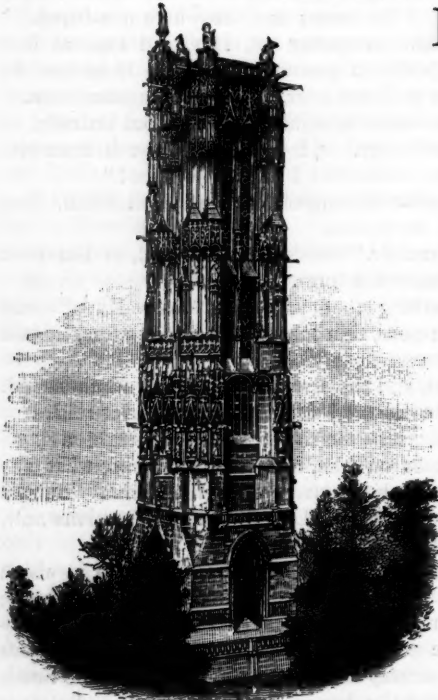
And although when, some months later, Arthur Bolsover took his bride to Barminster and introduced her as poor Ned Haviland's daughter, Mr. Gerridge thought he began to see daylight in a very obscure business, he did not communicate his suspicions to anyone ; and for lovers of the supernatural there is no more thrilling or inexplicable instance of their theories to be adduced, than the story of how £5,000 were spirited away some years ago by the ghost at Bolsover's Bank.

POT-POURRI.

FOUR SCENES ON FRENCH GROUND.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND," &c.

FIRST SCENE.



TOUR ST. JACQUES.

PONT DE BRIQUES.

One of those lovely days that come to us only occasionally. A day to make you feel that there is a great deal of heaven upon earth, and the gates of paradise are nearer than you thought for. A day all sunshine; soft, balmy, yet bracing air, blue and liquid sky. White, fleecy, floating clouds, threw rapid lights and shadows upon the landscape.

We were sitting in the garden—the two Hs. and the present writer — how distinguish these two Hs. one from the other?—waiting for Madame Monroger, of the Hôtel Monroger, Pont de Briques, to announce our mid-day refreshment.

The scene might have found a corner in the garden of Eden before the serpent tempted Eve: chiefly, perhaps, because to-day its principal charm came from heaven itself: that wonderful atmosphere, sky and sun. Fruit trees in the orchard were in full flower, an apparently endless extent of pink and white blossom. Occasionally a stronger breeze sent down a shower of petals, more beautiful than snow flakes, more rosy than the morn, strewing the ground with a carpet Titania and her court might have desired. Taller trees immediately about us, bearing no manner of fruit, swayed and murmured, and seemed to invite us to closer communion. But

possessing no key to the language of trees, we could only sit and listen to the unknown tongue, and feel that its melody touched a corresponding chord in the human heart. The two boys were swinging.

Suddenly, from one of the branches almost overhead, came forth a note, rich, velvety and unmistakable. It was the jug-jug of the nightingale, and H. major and minor came down to listen, enraptured, as to a discovery in the world of nature. In their young lives they had never yet heard a nightingale. But for our own part, we were at once carried in spirit to a far-off Alpine range, where under the shadows of a mountain of eternal snows, amidst groves of trees, reposes an old château—not for the first time introduced to these pages—and where, day after day, and week after week, day and night unceasing, we have listened, in days that are no more, to countless nightingales, ever pouring a flood of celestial music upon the air.

"What bird can it be?" said H. major. "It is a note I never heard before."

"And comes straight from paradise," said H. minor. "I don't think it belongs to earth at all, for I never heard anything so lovely. Is it a nightingale, *padre mio*?"

For full three minutes it poured forth its song, that nightingale, in the branches above us, its little brown body, its black sparkling eyes and pulsing throat in full view. Then it ceased, spread its wings, and flew away. We saw and heard it no more. A light had suddenly gone out.

"It must have come for our especial benefit. Don't you think so?" said H. major. "And how I wish it would come again!"

At this moment Madame Monroger appeared in the doorway, a very comely figure, a woman all gentleness and honesty.

"*Monsieur est servi*," she said, folding her hands and looking the perfection of a landlady.

"Do you often hear the nightingale?" we asked, not knowing that it was ever heard in the neighbourhood of Boulogne-sur-Mer.

"Mais oui, monsieur. It comes to us every spring, and makes our happiness. Lovely little brown creatures! They ought to be as sacred as the swallows—but they are not."

On our way upstairs we had to pass the kitchen. The door was wide open. Did equal sight ever before tempt youth? Chairs, tables, dresser—everything was covered with at least a hundred country cream tarts, large and small, into which tantalising plums were introduced at minute intervals: all waiting their turn for the oven.

"Oh!" said H. major, in tones Aladdin might have used when the garden opened to his astonished vision and disclosed the trees all hung with flashing jewels.

"Better than nightingales!" cried the other H., without even apologising for the sacrilegious sentiment.

What was to be done? Hearts are not adamantine; small indulgences are an agreeable variation to the wholesome use of the rod; indirect pleadings are more forcible than downright demands. Here were looks and interjections too eloquent to be resisted.

"Can you supplement our déjeuner?" was the inevitable consequence of that open door.

"I had not begun to bake," replied Madame Monroger. "They are all for to-morrow. We always have music here on a Sunday, and a great many people come from all the country round, and dine, and dance in the garden, and enjoy themselves.—And I am celebrated for my cream tarts," she added, with simple modesty.

"Can't the oven be seven times heated?" enquired H. major, anxiously.

"I will do my best," laughed Madame Monroger. "Fortunately it is quite ready.—*De quel prix, monsieur?*" she added. "You see the tarts are of all sizes."

"That is left to madame's discretion," we laughed. But the boys took the law into their own keeping, and measuring a yard of hands in diameter by three yards of large round eyes in circumference, Madame, with a quiet but expressive nod, which seemed to intimate that she perfectly comprehended; and before now had gauged the measure of a schoolboy's capacity; and was quite equal to the occasion; chose out the largest and most plum-strewn of the collection, and sent it into the very depths of her capacious oven.—Comprehended? The slowest and most simple savage would have gathered the meaning of those signs.

We were conducted by a willing attendant to a primitive room above, with sanded floor and a table partly covered with a white cloth. Everything was elementary, down to the knives that would not cut, and the two-pronged forks that were never made for ornament and scarcely for use, and the massive plates that might have been thrown out of window without fear of hurt. These windows looked on to the quiet street of Pont de Briques. A stream passed under the road, and a weir, opposite, kept up an incessant rush, with the sound of a miniature cascade. Beyond the river was the railway station, within a dozen yards of the hotel.

But if Madame Monroger's rooms were primitive, her cuisine was excellent. As for the simplicity, even roughness of our surroundings, what mattered? Variety is charming: and the two yards of bread brought like a beadle's staff into the room by the abigail—who rejoiced in the distinguished name of Sophronisbe—and placed triumphantly upon the table, created quite a diversion.

We had come up the river that morning from Boulogne in broad sunshine: had engaged a rowing boat at the steps of the inner basin, and a youth, not exactly of "lordly mien," or clothed in purple, but of willing ways and intelligent mind, to assist in the mysterious navigation of the stream. With sunshine and blue skies it is a very

pleasant row, this, all the way to Pont de Briques. The river winds so much that in the distance you see Boulogne now before you, and now behind you, now on the right hand, and now on the left, with its harbour and shipping, and its consumptive cathedral perched on the heights of the upper town. You pass between reaches of green meadows, backed, perhaps, by a wooded hill, or decorated with a maison de campagne, prim and stiff as they generally are in France: a train shoots past your very bow, with its human freight, and goes puffing on towards Paris or Boulogne, as it may chance; a factory, or iron works, will show up in all their prosiness, yet poetical by reason of their surroundings.

We had left E. at the Hôtel des Bains, arranging flowers which she had bought from the old woman in the Marché—for it was Saturday and market day.

"You will come with us," Auntie Nellie, said H. senior. "We cannot leave you behind."

"I think not, Harry," replied E. "I have not sufficient confidence in your powers of handling an oar, and should expect to be left at the bottom of the river."

"But I assure you," remonstrated H. junior, "that there is not the slightest danger. *We* will protect you"—magnificently. "And besides that, you could not drown a fly in that shallow river if you tried. I assure you, Auntie Nellie, if you tried to drown a fly in the river, you couldn't do it. You must really come with us."

"I am not a fly," laughed E. "But indeed I cannot come. "Once, my dear Hastings, when I was a little girl, not so big as you ———"

"Please, I am not a girl," loftily interrupts H.

"Nothing half so good," retorts E. modestly. "Well, then, when I was a little girl, without any reference to you as a boy, I went up a river with your grandpapa and Major Oliver. The Major understood nothing about rowing and nearly drowned us all. I have never quite recovered the terror of that day, and never quite liked rowing boats since then."

"And yet," protested H., "you constantly went out in the *Chip* last year. And at Southsea Regatta, didn't you steer her home, and win the race?"

"A very different matter," replied E. "The *Chip* is not a rowing boat, and I knew whom I had to do with. Captain Broadley was on board, and I felt safe. When *you*, my dear Hastings, command the *St. Vincent* and invite me to accompany you in the *Chip*, I shall accept with pleasure."

So E. remained behind and lost one of our very pleasantest days on French ground: that bright, sunny row upon the river, the nightingale's song and the apple blossoms, Madame Monroger's hospitable exertions and superb "tarte," and a very happy remembrance for many a time to come. There are days in our lives when nothing

very startling or important has occurred, and yet the hours have been so strangely pleasant, there has been such a glowing atmosphere over all, an indescribable charm has so surrounded us, that they are remembered for ever. The charm lies partly in a fortunate conjunction of circumstances, including perfect harmony and assimilation of companionship. It also lies very much in the Unexpected.

Half way on our journey we had passed a telegraph office on the banks of the river.

"Let us send a message to Aunt E.," cried H. major, "telling her that we are quite safe, and asking her to take the next train to Pont de Briques."

"That wouldn't bring her," said H. minor. "Isn't half stiff



PONT DE BRIQUES.

enough. Say that our boat has been round bottom upwards, and we want her to come at once and identify us."

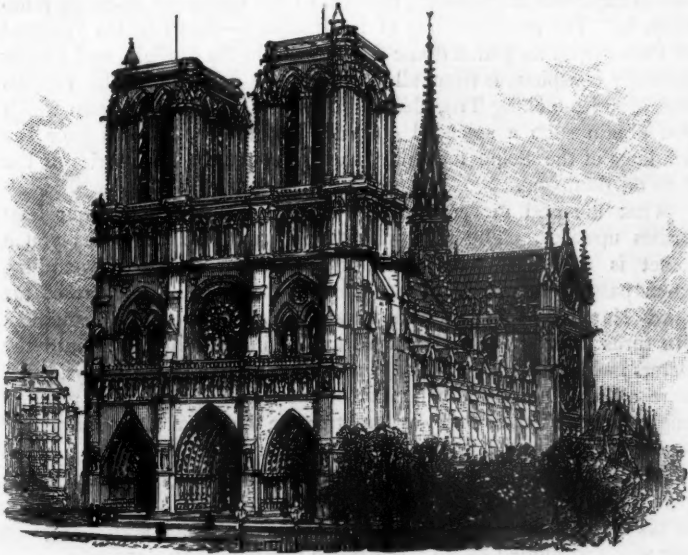
But the wires were allowed to rest in peace as far as we were concerned, and the boat shot on her way—bottom downwards. Towards Pont de Briques the river narrowed, and at last grew so shallow that a point was reached where there was nothing for it but to get out and walk over the rails: still piloted by our boatman, who, mooring his craft to the stump of an old tree, sprang up the banks with an energy that declared him as much at home on land as on water, and went far to prove his delight at paying his respects to Madame Monroger. The resources and excellence of her larder were evidently no new experience to him.

It all passed, that day: and there remains only a memory. A

remembrance of a nightingale's song, orchards blossom laden, floods of sunshine and white clouds floating over blue skies, and a perfect harmony : perfect happiness for a few hours in our little world of three ; the world forgetting.

SECOND SCENE.

PARIS. The fair city of Paris, with all its life and gaiety and diminished charms. For Paris is not what it was. France never improves under a Republic—and with the dissolution of the Court of the Tuileries has disappeared a great part of the attraction and refinement of social life in Paris : that nameless atmosphere which



NOTRE DAME.

once made it the first city in Europe. Nous avons changé tout cela, the French may now say with a vengeance, and the change is for the worse. The very air of Paris seems vulgarised. The very waiters in the hotels meet you with an *égalité*, fraternité sort of manner, suggestive of the new order of thought and feeling.

But to lives too young to draw invidious or regretful comparisons, there is still a good deal to charm in the Paris of to-day. A constant scene of life and animation, everything and everyone apparently having one object in view—amusement. The very streets seeming to lead to that one end and aim, though the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli are ponderous and heavy, and the interminable corridors of the Palais Royal with their multiplied jewellers' shops, one so like another, grow hopelessly monotonous.

And even now, few places can equal Paris in early spring, when the trees are putting on their first fresh green, and skies are blue, and the sparkling air is laden with whisperings of the coming summer. This year, indeed, those spring days had more than a suspicion of summer about them: they were hotter than most of the summer days that succeeded.

So you declare as, one morning, you take steamer at the Pont Royal and go up the Seine to Sèvres. What a pleasant trip it is, you think. How the chief buildings stand out on either side. The *Chambre des Députés*, grave and solemn looking, as if it ought to be the abode of learning, devoted to the science of astronomy, research into metaphysics or philology, rather than the distracted assembly it too often is. The great building of *les Invalides*—that Chelsea Hospital of Paris—with its gilded dome flashing out in the sunlight, and almost painfully conspicuous from all points of the compass. The curious and Moorish-looking *Trocadéro*, with its slim, high towers, from which you obtain such a splendid *coup-d'œil* of the capital, and trace the windings of the Seine for miles, and mark out the boundaries of the *Bois de Boulogne*.

What life and movement there is upon the water as your boat flashes upwards. The man who takes your fare and gives you a ticket is a red-hot Republican, if not a Communist. By-and-by, when passing the ruins of *St. Cloud*—that favourite resort of the third Napoleon—you remark upon the sadness of its destruction. He turns fiercely, and almost seems inclined to hurl you into the waters; wishing loudly that kings and emperors, palaces and dynasties, were all drowned in the depths of the sea, so that the “people” might have it all their own way, and trample the “*maudite aristocratie*”—*i.e.*, everything that is respectable—under their feet.

Soon after this you reach Sèvres, and, with feelings almost of relief, part from this firebrand, still trembling with wrath and the violence of his emotions, and bid adieu to the steamer, which seems to go on her way surrounded by an atmosphere pregnant with dynamite.

You cross the green and pass through the great gates leading towards the factory. As the hour of admission has not struck, you wander under the grateful shade of the trees in the Park of *St. Cloud*, listen to their murmurings, watch the sunlight gleaming through them, the creeping shadows cast upon the ground athwart the avenue; watch the men at work in the fossés, and big French boys on the greensward playing as only big French boys can play—in a silly, effeminate sort of way, which makes you long to instil a little manliness and the mysteries of cricket into them.

When the hour sounds from a neighbouring clock, factory and show-room doors are thrown open, and you are admitted. The collection is well worth seeing, you think, but not the factory. Scarcely anything of the process is shown you, and what you do see is not interesting. In our English manufactories the whole process

rom beginning to end is traced, but at Sèvres it is otherwise. You see the various processes of making the paste, one or two hand mouldings, and there it ends. You come away and almost feel as if you had been imposed upon.

But the collection is another matter—a collection of both old and modern Sèvres ; objects, as Mrs. Malaprop would say, of “bigotry and virtue,” sufficient to make the unwary waver and the weak to fall. You breathe an atmosphere of beauty and refinement, and point out to the attendant a small, exquisite tea service of delicate green and gold. “Ah, monsieur !” he says, “vous faites un bon choix. C’est le grand prix de la collection.”

After this, and before tempted to your own destruction—for many of these “things of beauty” are for sale—you leave the park and the factory behind you, and wandering to the very end of the one long, uninteresting street of Sèvres, come to a restaurant on the left-hand, where if they do not “loge à pied et à cheval,” at least they dispense “à boire et à manger.” There is such a homely air about it that you hesitate to enter, and peer through the windows with the desire of finding out if the interior is at least decent and in order. That peep decides the question, and you are lost. Madame, who seems watching for you as a spider for a fly, rushes forth and throws wide the door with effusion, and an “Entrez, entrez, messieurs ! Vous êtes les bien venus !”

There is nothing else for it. You are a prisoner, and must hold out a flag of truce. Would that all prisoners fared as well on falling into the hands of the enemy. Madame’s motto should be—“Excellent fare, wonderful cleanliness, moderate charges, and supreme civility.” She pilots you to an upper room facing the street, with an opposite dull, dead wall, and noisy tramcars rushing to and fro between Paris and Versailles. Instinct leads you to investigate, and downstairs you find something better. A long, low room, a number of small tables spread with white cloths, and windows opening to a garden which in itself is a picture of beauty and repose—fruit-trees all blossom and flowers all scent. You have the room to yourself. The garden is in broad sunshine ; you are in shade. It is all so quiet, so secluded from the world, the room is so primitive, the garden so primeval, that you feel in Arcadia. You have returned to the age of shepherds and shepherdesses. Here Phyllis and Corydon might live in bliss and repose. You compare it with the gorgeous grandeur of the Hôtel Continental where you happen to be staying, and declare a thousand times in favour of this rustic retreat.

But the trail of the serpent—le chat dans le coin—where is it ? At this moment, as far as we are concerned, it is in the hands of the two boys, who bring forth toy pistols and paper caps, and when Eulalie, —they all rejoice in fine names, these maidens who cross our path—enters with three plates and a collection of pewter spoons, they fire simultaneously with a terrific explosion, which causes Eulalie to start,

drop her burden with a crash, and shriek out: "Madame! des Communards! Je suis percée de balles!"

Madame rushes to the attack. A woman of discernment, she at once seizes the situation, and with a nod and a smile, instead of giving the culprits in charge, abuses the victim. Thus is justice, for the most part, dealt out in this world! The plates are gathered up, and, nearly an inch in substance, are none the worse for their little adventure. We administer a word in season, but, too palpably got up for the occasion, it misses fire. The pistols are pocketed for the space of at least sixty seconds. We are deep in the politics of the hour and a paper offered to us by our thoughtful hostess; there is a great calm in the room after the late storm; we congratulate ourselves on the perfect discipline and obedience of the two Hs. When bang! bang!—a double report from the garden, and the crack of doom; two cats' tails, erect and disappearing behind a distant wall; two boys in convulsions: who return to the room as they left it—by leaping over the window-sill.

Ah, well! it is the same old story over again. And we give a sigh to our lost youth, our days of delight in sham pistols, of laughter easily provoked, of care and sorrow unknown: days when that terrible Old Man of the Sea had not yet climbed our back, and established himself there for ever.

"I remember the gleams and glooms that dart
Across the schoolboy's brain,
The song and the silence in the heart,
That in part are prophecies and in part
Are longings wild and vain!"

Lunch over, and Madame's very moderate bill paid, Madame herself sees you to the door—not for danger to her pewter spoons, but to do you honour in the plenitude of her hospitable heart. And as Madame sends after you a cheery "A la prochaine fois, Monsieur!" you quietly go your way to the river, and take boat to Suresnes, the next upward stage, stroll into the Bois de Boulogne, and contemplate artificial nature under the miniature rocks and waterfalls. Then, after a time, you retrace your steps, take a return boat to Paris, and once more enjoy the picturesque windings and changing scenes of the river. Altogether, it is a very pleasant way of spending a day; especially if you have to entertain boys who rejoice in freedom and sham pistols, and to whom the constant restraint of town without such interludes would soon grow irksome and monotonous.

Next morning, to vary the scene, you wander about Paris itself: stroll once again into the Louvre, with its galleries of treasures. Shall we ever forget one morning, years ago, quietly enjoying one of these rooms, when suddenly a great noise made itself heard: a distant murmur of feet and voices, which grew nearer and louder, like the rush and roar of a mighty army. What could it be?

Thoughts of a fresh revolution suggested themselves—for, living in Paris, one always feels as if living on the edge of a volcano. On it came, a mighty human tide, surging and swaying, and at length proved to be a party of Cook's excursionists "personally conducted." They never stopped, never seemed to look at the pictures, but moved steadily onwards, a living stream, clumsy feet and awkward movements resounding upon the parquets like a ceaseless shower of musketry.

To-day, if you chance to be with us, you will be spared the infliction. It is happy spring time, and the terrible tourist season is still in the far distance. But this morning it does not do to linger too long in the galleries. There is a time for everything, as there are the seven ages of man, and boyhood is not altogether the age for appreciating art treasures; for lingering over the pathos of a Murillo, the beauty of a Raphael, the devotion of a Correggio, the tone of a Rembrandt, or the gorgeous colouring and voluptuousness of a Rubens. So a few of the most noteworthy are examined and the rest are left for later years, if haply they may dawn.

You wander round to the Tuileries, and sigh as you gaze upon its ruined grandeur, where, in a wooden shed, the Post Office has found a temporary resting place. The very birds in the gardens: gardens once so beautiful and well kept: seem to feel the change, give a melancholy chirp to departed glory, and eat crumbs out of your hand as you go down the orange walk—some of those trees are said to be four hundred years old—with little twinkling eyes that seem to have acquired a heritage of sadness.

Passing round, you follow the banks of the noble river, calmly flowing to-day. But in its time it has run red with the blood of martyrs, and even now counts its unhappy victims by scores, who put a tragic end to their existence by plunging beneath its current, to reappear for identification in the ghastly Morgue. For life in Paris is frivolous, and therefore has its opposite, where extremes meet: every frivolous life has its tragic possibilities.

On the further bank are the tall houses one knows so well, crowded with the same tragic elements of life and suffering; innumerable domestic histories belonging to all sorts and conditions of men and women. How many, you wonder, would bear to have closets thrown open and skeletons laid bare? How many have *not* their skeleton-closet? How many of these existences would stand the scrutiny of daylight? On the other hand, how many quiet, unseen lives of devotion, of suffering in silence and secret, of religious fervour, that would not hesitate to accept the stake? How many unknown Joans of Arc—unknown even to themselves? This frivolous city, for all its wickedness and all its woe, teems, like all great cities, with unrecorded glories.

Beneath are the old booksellers' shops where you pick up treasures of learning and antiquity, ancient books and curious

bindings ; and there also are the old bric-à-brac magazins, crammed with things new and old, good and bad. But these matters and reflections are not interesting to boys, do not occur to them. More interesting is that noble pile we come to presently, Nôtre Dame : one of the most beautiful of gothic structures, yet less so than before its restoration. To-day a grand funeral is going on. The chancel is brilliant with lighted candles ; priests with gorgeous vestments flit to and fro, and curtsey up and down, like ladies in

a fashionable drawing-room ; the organ sighs its melancholy strains through the solemn aisles and arches ; that dark burden in the centre is about to be carried to its long home, and another soul has gone to its account.

Perhaps that last resting place is to be Père la Chaise, and you may take flight thither, passing on your way the Place de la Bastille, and noting the stones that mark the boundaries of that inquisitorial gaol, which the mob seized in 1789, and an Order of the National Assembly brought happily to the ground in 1790 : at least one good action performed by an infuriated people. Ascending the narrow streets, lined on either

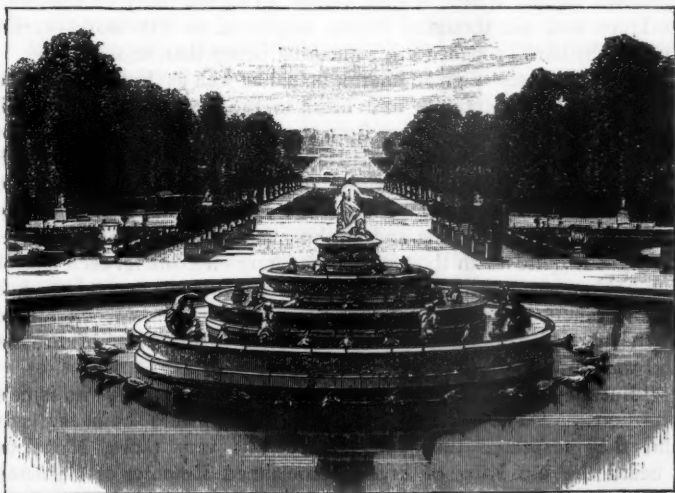


COLONNE DE LA BASTILLE.

side with melancholy shops displaying tombstones, and hideous wreaths and immortelles, and cheap black oval pictures on glass, you reach the great gates of Père la Chaise and toil up the avenues, and thank the guides for their offered escort, but decline their civilities. Here you may wander hour after hour, if so disposed, marking one grand tomb, one great name after another ; trying to imagine the scene when, during the siege of 1870, five hundred wretched Communards were said to have been buried in one common grave ; until you agree that it is the most mournful, most tiring place in the world, and almost envy the sleeping figures of Abelard and

Héloïse, that, under their stone canopy, seem to repose so calmly after life's fitful fever.

Fly backwards for a moment over Paris; over the head of the Bastille Column—the Colonne de Juillet, with its outstretched figure of Mercury that they choose to call Liberty resting one foot upon the globe, bearing in one hand the torch of enlightenment, in the other the broken chains of slavery—over the Tour St. Jacques, beautiful with gothic ornamentation, and grey with the weight of three centuries of time; over the new Hôtel de Ville, taking care to drop the tribute of a tear at the ruin of the old, with all its lost beauty and charm. It is nothing but a recollection and a name, but its tradition is doubly kept alive by contrast with its successor.



VERSAILLES.

Pass over all this, over the broad flowing Seine, leaving Nôtre Dame to the left, with its towers, rich decoration, flying buttresses, and superb front; and guided by that small iron spire, light, straight and slender as an arrow, fold your wings and enter the Sainte Chapelle, that gem of thirteenth century Gothic art, small, but of such singular beauty, without rival in Paris or elsewhere; founded in the reign of St. Louis for the reception of the Crown of Thorns and other relics, since removed to Nôtre Dame. What a wonderful tone comes through those richly-stained windows with their exquisite tracery, some of the glasswork dating back six hundred years. How the dim religious light impresses mind and imagination. What a calmness falls upon the spirit. How you tread softly upon the pavement, dyed with a thousand hues by those matchless windows. What

a retreat from the garish day, the restless crowd, the noisy streets. You are in another world, "where all is pleasantness and all is peace." It has almost the beauty of an Alhambra, all the refinement of the gothic period, all the sanctity of a temple.

Once more take flight over Paris, but this time a wider flight, leaving the great city behind you, its very atmosphere, noise and crowd. Alight at the little town of Versailles; but passing over houses, streets, and the great square — where on a windy day the blast cuts you asunder and clouds of dust blind and suffocate you with a frightful persistence—fold your wings in the Park and Palace. You think how grand and magnificent it all is, how much more beautiful it might have been. The thousand million francs it cost Louis XIV., the thirty-six thousand workmen and six thousand horses employed in the work—surely they might have brought forth something better than this.

Yet it possesses a great charm, actual as well as historical. You may sit upon the terraces and listen to the famous band, *le Génie*, whilst you trace out its history from the days of *le Grand Monarque* to the downfall of the third Napoleon. You wander through the straight, stiff avenues, whose over-arching trees at least are beautiful in themselves, and defy the hottest midday sun. You watch the fountains playing and plashing, and perhaps wonder whether the sight is quite worth the ten thousand francs it costs for each exhibition. You stroll through the endless rooms, halls, corridors, and picture galleries, and give a passing wonder as to how it all looked when in 1870 it became the head-quarters of the King of Prussia, and was turned into a military hospital.

"But they did us no harm," says one of the old guides, who is conversational. "They did us no harm. They were quiet enough, and they respected the pictures. In this very place, *Monsieur*, I heard the old King of Prussia proclaimed Emperor of Germany. I thought then he was on his last legs, but I declare he's living still. Ah, well! our day of reckoning will come. We have only to wait for our revenge, and we shall get back Alsace and Lorraine, and all our lost honour."

Bidding farewell to this old guide, with his interesting reminiscences, you wander further afield into the Little Trianon, and muse over the palmy days of *Madame du Barry*, when beauty was everything, and morals were not too closely examined, and wealth rained from the splendour-loving King as manna from the skies. You may go yet further into the Grand Trianon, where you will sigh over the sad fortunes of thrice beautiful, thrice hapless *Marie Antoinette*, and marvel what manner of fiends dwelt in human form that could place such a head upon the block. Finally, you pass into that wonderful repository of gilded coaches and gala equipages, which altogether put to shame and ridicule the illustrious state chariot of my Lord Mayor of London.

And then you will be glad to return to anchor on the terraces of the great château, and contemplate the stiff avenues with their statues and vases, all in such perfect order that you wonder whether in autumn the leaves themselves are permitted to fall. You are on high ground, and the coup-d'œil is pleasant enough, and if the band happens to be playing, you feel that in itself is worth a flight from Paris.

To-day we three are almost alone, and as Satan finds mischief for idle hands, pistols are produced, and in alleys unseen paper caps are let off *ad libitum*. In a few minutes down comes a flying figure, armed with a stout wand of office and trembling with excitement—the brass-buttoned, full-uniformed guardian of these domains.

He stops before us with a low bow, and, it must be admitted, a deprecating manner.

"Monsieur, might I venture to request that the young gentlemen put up their pistols? I assure you the report is terrific, and since the war and the Commune, people—especially nervous ladies—have a great fear of the sound of firearms. It is not for myself"—with a polite shrug—"I assure you I am not afraid; I am not nervous; but it is for those who are."

Here, indeed, might Shakespeare cry *Much ado about Nothing*. All this peroration for toy pistols and paper caps, in grounds absolutely deserted. But the disturbers of the public peace and destroyers of weak nerves are recalled; pistols are banished to unseen pockets, where, no doubt, they are quickly burning a hole; Diogenes bows, excuses himself, and is about to withdraw.

"But what do you make of that noise below?" we ask, of a tremendous amount of firing that has been going on incessantly for the last hour, apparently within two hundred yards of us.

"Ah! monsieur, it is *désolant*, but the soldiers are practising and we cannot stop them."

"And the nervous ladies?"

"They suffer, monsieur, they suffer; but they know it is for the good of the country. Every sure marksman means death to a German—when the next war comes—and they would endure martyrdom in such a cause. *Au plaisir, monsieur!*"

Whether the *plaisir* is intended for the advent of another war, or a delicate compliment to ourselves seems uncertain; but the guardian having with such polite military tactics and without bloodshed raised this siege of Versailles, departs with full honours in a pompous procession of one, leaving us to make reflections on human nature.

Once more, and for the last time, spread your wings and fly back towards Paris; or if you are weary, borrow the magician's carpet and let it transport you through the air. Soar well above the world, and drink deep of the pure ether. Take in all the landmarks beneath you. The flowing, winding Seine, twisting about like a great silver snake;

the park of St. Cloud, the factory and town of Sèvres, which became almost a ruin under the unsparing hands of the Prussians as they bombarded it from Mont Valérien; the Bois de Boulogne; the great Babylon itself, restless, surging, mist-enshrouded. Steer for that gilded dome, which flashes out in the sunlight as if it would gather to itself all the warmth and glory of the sun. Pass through it, with the power of a disembodied spirit to whom material objects are no obstruction, and bars, bolts, and prison walls are drawn and raised in vain.

Alight on the pavement of the solemn church of les Invalides, and in an open circular crypt gaze down from above upon the tomb of the great Napoleon, who reposes here after life's storm and tempest. The round walls are polished granite; the massive sarcophagus, one block of brown granite weighing sixty-seven tons, was brought from Finland. You cannot touch it, but look down from a distance, as if it were too sacred for man's approach: an arrangement adding immensely to its effect. The solemnity, dignity, and silence which enwrap it could not well be exceeded. Compare it for a moment with the miserable monument in St. Paul's raised to the memory of Wellington. It is a majestic tomb, this of Napoleon, worthy of the great conqueror who lies there: one of the most imposing, most impressive sights of Paris. Before it you are silent with a thousand thoughts of wars and bloodshed, cruelties unsparing, energies superhuman, ambitions disappointed, marches conquering—and to be conquered! One day all the glories and powers of the world at command, the homage of kings and the obedience of popes—the next, a melancholy exile watching the clouds, tracing pictures in the fire, waking in despair from dreams that mock as phantoms of past realities; nothing left for hope but the dawn of a day when the brain shall cease to rack, and the body to suffer, and the accounts are closed.

Gazing upon the majestic grandeur of this tomb, such thoughts flash through the mind in quick succession, like the pictures of a phantasmagoria.

THIRD SCENE.

GUINES. The Hotel du Lion d'Or, already introduced to these pages.* But where is Mdle. Henriette, who on a previous occasion treated us in so lordly a manner: killing the fatted calf and making a charge ruinous to herself: spoiling two boys who, pillow-throwing in the early morning, had broken jugs and damaged carpets and otherwise turned the house out of windows: only to be called "pauvres chers anges," and treated to jam out of table spoons, and hot rolls and unlimited butter in their room, where they had been kept for "detention." "Je ne sais pas, monsieur,"

* December, 1882. "Across the Water."

said Mdlle. Henriette, in her loud but hearty tones, and in words that will not translate, "*où vous trouvez la force de punir ces deux anges. Monsieur Henri c'est vous en miniature ; monsieur Hastings, c'est votre tempérament en enfant.*"—Charge for broken jugs and spoilt carpets, smashed windows and demolished chairs ! She would rather any day pay ten francs out of her own pocket for the pleasure of seeing such beautiful spirits. Let pillows fly up the chimneys and chairs out of the windows, she would scream at the fun and cry, *Toujours gai, et vive la bagatelle !*"

It was in vain to argue with Mdlle. Henriette : she evidently herself had been a very naughty child in her time, and all her sympathies in this direction had survived her youth.

But where is she to-day ? Alas, not to be heard or seen. Mdlle. Henriette has retired from public life. The hotel knows her no more. "Mdlle. Henriette," says Malvina, later on, "has retired upon a fortune of twenty thousand francs a year, honourably gained : and proving, monsieur, that now, as ever since the foundation of the world, Honesty is the best policy."

This sad news throws a gloom over the quaint, very French Place of Guines, where weekly markets are held on a small scale, and farmers' wives and daughters compete with each other in the excellence and cheapness of their wares—a combination of qualities said to be impossible in all other parts of the world.

Without the welcome of Mdlle. Henriette's smile, the vivacious tones of her voice, made to command a regiment—I verily believe there was the stuff of a Joan of Arc in her—we have no desire to linger ; and "the one voiture du pays," as she once wrote to us : a lumbering old landau, dating back to the days of the Grand Monarque, if not earlier : a heavy machine, which looks like nothing so much as a huge uncovered sarcophagus, and which rolls and pitches like a "gig" at sea—if we may be excused the *jeu de mot* : as this pride of the pays and eighth wonder of the world is in waiting, we all four embark—for Paris is over and E. has joined us—and bid farewell to Guines, its market place and the Lion d'Or. It is a long farewell ; we shall not see it again. There is a loop-line now open to Landry, and a train returning to Calais in the afternoon will serve our purpose, and enable us to reach Boulogne at a reasonable hour.

The same flat old road as of old. Not a change in any landmark, nor an addition thereto. We are not in a country overrun with population. Houses do not struggle up by degrees into suburbs, to become in time—like our terrible Metropolis—towns without beginning or ending. The people of Guines and its neighbourhood go on in their quiet ways from generation to generation ; births, marriages and deaths are the chief events which distinguish the rolling of the ages ; nothing but the sundial marks the shifting of the hours ; the four seasons alone point the year.

The driver occasionally whips up his horses, and they, poor beasts of burden, harnessed to this Egyptian sarcophagus, yet seem to think it no greater penance than following the plough, and trot on willingly enough. On either side the flat dull road, are flat dull fields, without even a hedgerow to break their monotony. In the distance the rising, hilly woods of Guines, where our tender childhood was once taken nutting by some older and very wicked boys, who, pretending to lose us, struck such terror to our juvenile heart that, to use an expressive French term, *le sang bouleversé*, we were *suffoqué*, and laid upon a sick bed for a whole week.

Presently, the little roadside altar, decorated as usual with tinsel and dead flowers and old rags—votive offerings from those who possibly have nothing better to give. And, remembering the widow's mite, who shall cast the first stone of reflection at these humble marks of religious fervour—and if a superstitious faith—yet still a faith?

Next comes Landry itself. Passing over the little white bridge and turning to the left, we see in the distance a little old woman leaning upon a stick, the impersonation of an old witch, but with a face and expression and kindly, intelligent eyes no witch ever yet possessed. Yes, it is certainly true; Joséphine has reached the age when people grow downwards very quickly; when the silver thread is loosening, and a far-off look in the eyes seems already to have caught a glimpse of that world whither the spirit is surely hastening.

She is watching, and it is said that a watched-for visitor never comes. But proverbs are not infallible any more than are those who made them. As usual she is attended by her court, who bow down to her, and are her willing servitors; her brother, still a hale old man, and her niece, Malvina, who has sacrificed years of lucrative service to minister to her relative. Joséphine is still the oracle of the village, in virtue of having seen much of life, gone through a wide experience, become acquainted with foreign parts, ending her days in dignified independence.

The meeting need not be described. She leads the way into her cottage, which, like herself, looks as if it were kept in perpetual state, swept and garnished at painfully short intervals. A glance at Malvina brings forth the reply: "Ah oui, monsieur," with a laugh and a shake of her good-natured head; "tout tombe sur moi. C'est que ma tante est difficile, dà! Et ces messieurs—qu'ils sont grands! On ne les reconnait plus."

"Ces messieurs" for the moment are being put through their facings by Joséphine, who, trembling with emotion, begins to realise that after all, the world will roll on in spite of her own retirement. Whereas she once looked down upon them, she now has to look upwards. She laments in spirit.

"If this sort of thing is capable of going on without me, it is

time I was laid aside," with a deep drawn breath. "It is very singular, but I don't quite see where I could have improved matters. Still all this is outward. Mademoiselle Ellen, are they well looked after? Is their wardrobe in perfect condition? everything placed to their hand? Every attention paid them in right of seniority?"

"Pretty well, considering," replies E. "But of course it was very different in our day, *ma bonne*, with you at the head of affairs. That does not happen in any family twice in a life-time."

With which adroit and not misplaced little compliment, Joséphine's fine brow clears, sunshine breaks over her good old face, and she abandons herself without reserve to the happiness of the moment. They are golden moments indeed to her, flying on mighty wings. For much has to be said; many recollections have to be gone over, and she has to devote some time to the mere fact of realizing that, once more assembled under one roof, the bliss of former days is renewed for a brief period. These infrequent visits are the red-letter days of her life; she broods over them, feeds upon their recollection, lives in anticipation; yet only quite realizes them when we have once more, as a flash of lightning in a summer sky, passed out of her sight and sound.

"Now, Malvina, for some fishing." This from the two Hs. And before long they have departed with lines and nets and all necessary paraphernalia, and make for a certain round pond, where eels come at your beck and call, and fine sport is to be had. Malvina feels her position. She carries the bait, and bears the bag destined to hold whatever fish may come to their nets. She also has the difficult task assigned her of restraining enthusiasm, and insisting upon a punctual return to the cottage, without which the afternoon train would be lost, and for the time being we should be houseless wanderers upon the face of the globe.

Who comes this way? No less a personage than Pascal, "*le cousin*," Joséphine's secretary and amanuensis, who has snatched half-an-hour from his work to come and *souhaiter le bon jour*, and have a chat upon his favourite topic, politics. He is singularly intelligent and clear-headed. But they are all a race to themselves in that respect, this clan, beginning with Joséphine herself. As for Pascal, the last time we met he mapped out the political situation of Europe: troubles that would arise with Egypt; complications of the Russian question; humiliations for England through mismanagement—all foretold with strange accuracy.

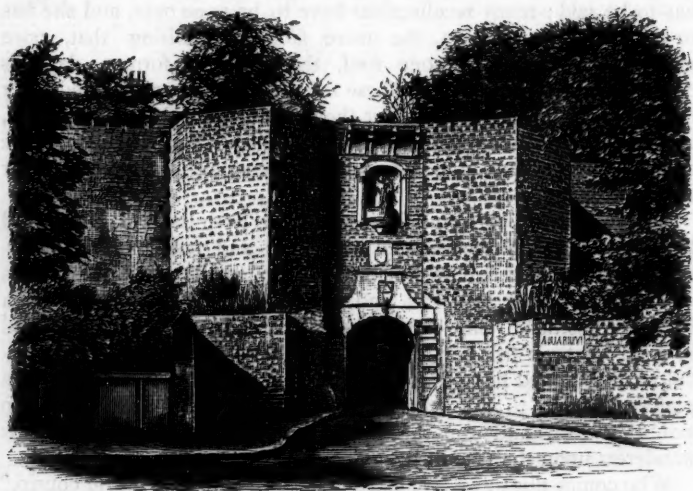
"Pascal," we said, "you are a wizard. You live here, out of the world, from one year to another, no one near you capable of sharing your thoughts and opinions—and you know more of the future of Europe than many of her statesmen."

"That is the very reason," replied Pascal, in his calm way, his great blue eyes, with so much width between them, full of intelligence. "I have no one to argue with: no opinions to hear on the other side:

I form my own impressions and—such as they are—keep to them. When I am following the plough, or sowing the seed (Pascal is a propriétaire and cultivates his own land), thoughts come into my head, and I seem to see what people will do and how things will turn out. I don't know chess, monsieur: I never saw it played: but I have heard that they who look on see more of the game than they who take part in it."

Yes, Pascal is a philosopher. He is out of place here; was intended for great things; is a village Hampden. Each time we see him this impression strengthens.

But the fishermen are returning: Malvina staggering under the weight and woe of her burden: much laughter and chatter waking



BOULOGNE GATE.

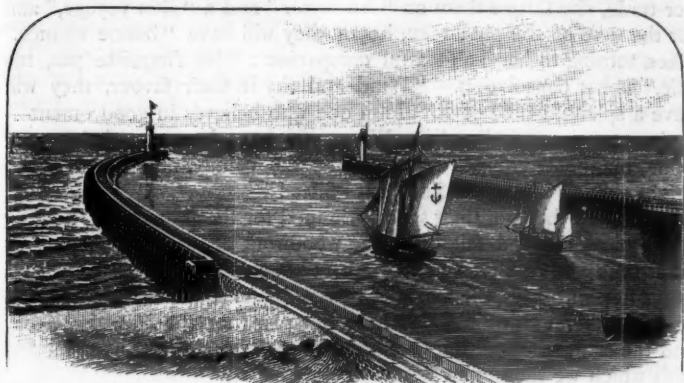
echoes in the solitary lane, where small, white cottages are dotted about at infrequent intervals, and the sound of the wooden hatchet is loud as it beats out the flax, and a scent of peat, issuing from open doorways, is in the air. This Landry is the cleanest and neatest village in the whole département of the Pas de Calais, and its people must needs be the most respectable. Each time in coming away we feel as if we had gone through some village pastoral or idyl, which has left behind it a tranquil melody. It has been a glimpse of another world; quite another world; strangely pleasant and soothing, as of an oasis where life passes without rush and roar, without wear and tear; where the steam whistle is an importation of to-day, and ordinary life goes on as it did a century or two ago.

To-day, when the fatal hour chimes, and last good-byes are over, and the inevitable question, "*Quand vous reverrai-je, mes enfans?*"

has received the oracular answer, "A la prochaine occasion, ma bonne," we turn slowly away, escorted by Malvina, to the railway station. One last look at that drooping figure in the road. She neither stirs nor waives; her eyes are fixed in melancholy. Then a bend in the lane takes us out of sight.

FOURTH SCENE.

BOULOGNE-SUR-MER. Pleasant Boulogne, with all its French life, gaiety and animation, splendid sea and sparkling air. What makes this difference between English and French ways, manners, and habits? Twenty miles of sea between us, but twenty thousand miles apart in tone and feeling, mind and impressions. We have our excellent virtues and solid qualities—a solidity occasionally allowed to run to seed; but the French, with all their lightness, ready wit and vivacity,



BON VOYAGE

possess the secret of passing their lives so that the hours or the day linger not. Anyone hipped from causes mental or physical, taking up his quarters at an English watering-place, will probably find the evil increase; it will not be the fault of his surroundings, animate or inanimate, if it improves. But let him repair to Boulogne or any other French sea-coast town, and if there is no quick recovery of health and spirits the case must be hopeless. We must, however, except Calais. Possessing the purest and best air in the world, its gloom amounts to a calamity, weighs you down as an incubus. It was wounded pride, not affection for the old place, that caused Queen Mary to utter those memorable words.

There is no place in Boulogne quite so distinctive as the Grand' Place at Calais; but, having said this, you have said all. Boulogne has its old gateways, its ramparts and fortifications, which make a

very pleasant walk on summer evenings. Boulogne is brim-full of life, and the old part of the town, devoted to the fishing population, is extremely quaint and characteristic. A very characteristic scene, too, when the fish-women assemble on the port in gay costumes, short petticoats, and long gold earrings and marvellously got-up caps; whilst, baskets on shoulders, these matelottes laugh and shout at each other and throw badinage, and display bare legs and feet that match so well their handsome faces.

Or you may find a crowd of them at the end of the pier, eagerly watching a boat going out to fish, it may be for weeks, or it may be only for hours. One of them, her sweetheart on board, with anxious, eager face is counting her beads and asking her favourite saint's protection. Her neighbour, whose days of sweet courtship are forgotten as much as the full honeymoon which ended them, has a husband going out. She is not counting her beads, or invoking special protection for the *Belle Marie*; but with a voice that was certainly made to match her trade, she throws them an "Au revoir" and a "Bon voyage," and for the sake of the pot-au-feu, hopes they will have "bonne chance." Then turning to her half-tearful companion: "Ne t'inquiète pas, ma mie," is her consolation. "Wind and sky in their favour, they will have a splendid time of it. I am one who believes in good omens—j'm'y connais moi, j'te dis. When you have been married twenty years, ma belle, you will learn to take life calmly, and look on the bright side of things.—Allons, mes filles!"

And away they go, their sabots, donned for the promenade, making a rythmical rise and fall upon the woodwork of the pier, keeping as good time and firm step as a company of soldiers.

"After all," says H. major, "this is better than Paris. We can breathe here. I would rather have this pier than the Rue de Rivoli, and the sands than all the Champs Elysées." A wholesome reflection with which we thoroughly agree.

It is Saturday and market day, and we go off to buy flowers and take a general look round. The flower-woman, whose complexion deepens year by year and matches her reddest roses, sees us from afar, and makes pantomimic signs to the effect that if we are faithless enough to go to any other flower stall than hers she shall die of a broken heart. But we are never faithless to old friends, and through the intricate mazes of stalls, and much pressed by holders to buy up all they possess, we reach the old woman. She immediately falls into attitudes, pays compliments all round, protests that Boulogne would cease to be Boulogne without our visits, makes button-holes "pour ces jeunes messieurs," who, of course, have changed out of all knowledge, presents Mademoiselle with a small bouquet, and finally sets apart of her best for despatchment to the hotel, invariably taking just half the amount of her primary demand. "Toujours à l'Hôtel des Bains, Mademoiselle? On y est si bien! Les mêmes appartements, n'est-ce pas—No. 39. Ah! que je suis enchantée de vous voir! Pour

moi vous faites la pluie et le beau temps. Au plaisir, messieurs et dame !”

By degrees old landmarks are reconnoitred, old impressions renewed. We do not forget to pay our visit to Miss Osborne, who has not seen the outside of her convent walls for nearly half a century. A smiling Sister conducts us into the “Parloir de St. Joseph,” with a closely-barred, closely-shuttered grating at the further end. Presently, a far-off closing of doors, far-off footsteps approaching, the shutters swing back, and Sœur Marie-Ursule, in nun’s dress, pale, placid face and quiet, soothing voice, stands before us, accompanied by another Sister. The interview is interesting, yet melancholy, though the melancholy is on our side, not on hers. It comes of the thought of all those buried years, that retired life : the living death, as it were, of one who, graceful and accomplished above women, might have played her part in the world and made the happiness of those around her. The interview is at an end. E. puts her hand through the grating—it will admit none but a very small hand—and shakes hands with Sœur Marie-Ursule. We, not permitted a like privilege, are dismissed with a stately, old-fashioned courtesy, the shutters swing to, footsteps are heard receding into that living tomb, where, nevertheless, the nuns seem happy and contented. And we, too, depart.

Then comes one fine morning, when the two Hs., doing gymnastics, or practising the tight-rope, or performing something equally wonderful and out of place in their room, H. minor manages to sprain his neck in a very frightful manner. Half-faintings and sickness ensue, Dr. Walker has to be called in, looks serious and prescribes. “He will be all right in a few days,” he says to us in an aside ; “but a hair’s breadth more and my services would have been of no use. Neither I nor anyone else could have done anything for him.”

So H. has to go about like a sick monkey, with head turned forty-five degrees out of position. But looking on the bright side of things, he reflects that good comes out of evil, for in consequence of this accident we are detained in Boulogne beyond our time : and extra days, somehow, are often best days. By Saturday H. has recovered and the angle of forty-five degrees has disappeared. “There only remains the shock to the system,” says Dr. Walker, who has been kindness and skill throughout ; “and he must stay here until the very last moment for the sake of this wonderful climate.” H. dances a horn-pipe, which threatens to bring back all the mischief, and takes upon himself to plan the excursion up the river as far as Pont de Briques and Madame Monroger’s. But, as we have seen, neither bribery nor persuasion can prevail upon E. to trust herself to their pilotage ; and so we leave her at the hotel, decorating the salon with flowers, and prepared to spend a quiet and contemplative morning.

Our morning leads to enchanted regions : trees laden with blossom, branches whispering in the wind, a nightingale whose song still rings

in our ears as we write, the hospitable welcome of Madame Monroger, the indiscretion of cream tarts.—Upon so perfect a scene let the curtain fall and the visions fade.

Oh, youth ! youth ! Thine is the heritage of the world, thine the task of moulding destinies, thine the privilege of seeing all things through rose-coloured glasses. It will pass away ; therefore take of the good things God has given thee, and enjoy them to the uttermost. Yet remember, through all, to keep innocence in thine heart, and to do the thing which is right, for this, it is written, shall bring thee peace at thy latter end.



NIGHT.

FROM VICTOR HUGO.

A LITTLE child, beside me, fresh and fair,
 In slumber so profound and calm you slept
 You did not hear the doves that, murmuring there
 In the deep shade, their tender vigil kept.
 Pensive I breathed the sombre sweets of night—
 The solemn night.

I heard the angels flutter round your head,
 And watched your close-shut lids : pale primrose flowers,
 With noiseless touch, upon your sheets I spread,
 And prayed, with wet eyes, through the silent hours,
 Thinking on all that in the darkness waits—
 Lies hid and waits.

One day will be my turn so sound to sleep
 That I, like you, shall hear no murmuring dove :
 The night will be so dark, the rest so deep.
 Then you will come, then you will come, my love,
 And pay me back my gifts of fair white flowers—
 Prayers, tears, and flowers.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

A FORGOTTEN TRAGEDY.

By C. J. LANGSTON.

I.

IT was the best of times. A worthy prince vaulted into the throne hurriedly vacated by the treacherous and bigoted James. Men breathed freely, for the nightmare of persecution seemed at an end. And they drank freely, too—12,400,000 barrels of home-brewed ale to 5,000,000 of people: whilst we, with 27,050 breweries and a population twice as large, consume 900,000,000 gallons yearly. "It was merry in the hall where beards wagged all."

London, alternately plundered, cajoled, psalm-smitten and bullied, was herself again, and could say, like the sun-dial, "Horas Serenas sed numero." The austerities of Windsor and the revelries of Whitehall were alike over, and reason had come to the rescue in the person of an honest but somewhat phlegmatic king. What matter that the country was on the eve of bankruptcy, that the plague of society known as the "seven barren years in the west of Europe," had just begun; that the threepenny loaf was rising to ninepence, and wheat to more than sixty shillings a quarter; that the agricultural wage was tenpence a day, and, perhaps as a consequence, every sixth person was a pauper?

What matter! in truly Roman fashion, though bread be scarce the games must be had; and London, representing the intelligent tenth of England and Wales, is all astir to behold young Mistress Anne Bracegirdle at the theatre in Covent Garden in a new character.

She is a lady of portly presence and dignified mien, who nobly holds her own amid an evil generation. With sufficient beauty to attract and render her a favourite in public, she exercises in private a certain coldness and hauteur which keeps fools at arms' length and makes the profligate beware. Woe to the thoughtless wretch who would presume to take a liberty with Mistress Anne: a hundred brawny arms would know the reason why; and yet Achilles has a vulnerable point, and did not the majestic Sarah of our grandfathers fall in love with a sorry young actor?

So was it with Mistress Bracegirdle two hundred years ago. Whilst looking down like moonlight upon the crowd of gouty peers, military roués, and scented dandies at her feet, she turned as a sun towards a humble actor, William Mountford, who had only an excellent disposition and character to recommend him, and to him she was, platonically speaking, all sweetness and light. Among the rejected suitors some took the matter with a pinch of snuff, philosophically;

"What care I how fair she be
If she be not fair for me?"

Others retired to neighbouring coffee houses and fired off explosive missives; and two of their number, Lord Mohun and his alter ego, Captain Richard Hill, proceeded to extremities.

Lord Mohun was a bright specimen of the fast man about town at the end of the seventeenth century. He would have been splendid as a brigand, or a sea captain, which was much the same thing; or in the war which ended five years later; being brave, dashing, and daring. But unfortunately he had a surfeit of what most men want—money and leisure, and that took him off in his prime; for, upon a trifling quarrel in 1714, he and the Duke of Hamilton fought in Hyde Park like Kilkenny cats, leaving no survivor.

His companion, Captain Hill, like Andrew Stoney Robinson of later history, was a villain to the back bone. A bully, and therefore a coward, he would have been prime minister in that Government of Mohocks which, in 1712, was the terror of London by night; and which found diversion in flattening the noses of solitary servants, rolling defenceless females in barrels down Constitution Hill, and making peaceful citizens caper with sword-thrusts until they dropped fainting in the gutter.

These two worthies were drinking heavily at The Horse tavern in Drury Lane, when Lord Mohun exclaimed:

"Split me, Hill, if I am not ready to carry her off."

"I am resolved to have the blood of Mountford," replied Hill.

"Be not so sure," said his lordship. "Mountford is good at fence: he has been waylaid."

"Never stir alive," answered Hill, "if I am not on him at once, and if the villain dares to resist, I will stab him like a dog."

Mistress Bracegirdle, all innocent of harm, is preparing for the evening performance. Her humble attendant, Elizabeth Walter, has patched and powdered and rouged her mistress like unto *Mrs. Oldfield*—"And, Betty, give this cheek a little red." The toilet is completed, but where is her knight-errant, Will Mountford.

There is an unusual crowd in Howard Street, and people are hurrying along the Strand; and flaming links light up ghastly faces; and amid the hum of voices a woman shrieks and falls: and the watch are bearing the manly form of Mountford to Mr. Bancroft, the chyrurgeon. He is still alive, but life is ebbing fast, and he hastens to tell of the encounter. "'Your servant, Mr. Mountford,' said Lord Mohun, embracing me, and pressing me against the wall. Then Captain Hill, he strikes me on the ear, and being in a manner pinioned by his lordship, I was repeatedly stabbed without further words; for Hill was in and through me before my sword was out."

Meanwhile the murderer, throwing away his sword, hurries down Surrey Street, and reaches the purlieu of the Thames, where few dare follow him: and Mohun, half mad with liquor, defies the angry crowd, shouting, "I am glad Hill is not taken, and I don't care a

farthing if I am hanged for him, but I wish he had some of these counters of mine, for I fear he will be in a sorry plight."

Young Mistress Anne Bracegirdle heard of poor Will Mountford's death with much the same composure as the Russian Empress Catherine received tidings of the departure of her forty-first favourite; or the Lady Jane, of Tapton Hall, of the fishy metamorphosis of good Sir Thomas. It was not the age of fine feeling, and like the sedate Sarah Siddons, the charming actress, Anne, may have put her tears into a bottle for stage purposes, although she sent her maid to purchase a copy of the tragedy being wailed down the street to the usual refrain of "Now ponder well, you parents dear." Besides, did not great Anna herself, with admirable fortitude, eat three hearty meals on that mild October day, when her dear hubby was no more?

Follow, still follow, and in this strange, eventful history, I will show you, as far as I am able to trace, that the murderer still bears the brand, and is cursed with the restless solitude of Cain. London awakes to a sense of the crime, the hue and cry is fierce, and Captain Hill, fearing betrayal, flies from the rotten houses near the river into the open country. He is sober enough now, and changing his steinkirk neckcloth, red waistcoat, and laced coat for the dress of a drover, he avoids the main roads, and tramps stealthily to the midlands. How he maintains himself and fills an empty purse is scarcely known, but he is more than suspected of "collecting rents on the road;" being recognised by an acquaintance when he stopped the Lichfield stage coach.

But ill-gotten gains melt into thin air, and even then the calling of Claude Duval was apt to end in a noose and a ride upon nothing. At length he reaches a weird, lonely habitation, still known as Moon's Moat.

Twelve miles south of the great centre of industry, Birmingham, and two miles east of Redditch, in the parish of Beoley, we come upon the "ghoul-haunted woodland"—Moon's Moat. Surely never spot was more suited for mystery and murder, never spot seems more haunted by the sad memories of the past. The very air is oppressive, as if weighted with woe; and when great winds sweep down the vale of the Arrow, they pause as if affrighted, in the near hand trees, and dare scarcely murmur in the decaying alders lest they awake the unshrouded dead.

The stagnant moat, dark and glassy as the eyes of her, the beautiful Mariolle, whose beauty proved no armour against fate, is full of slimy creeping things, with here and there a knotted trunk, gaunt and hoary, brooding over the dark water like some Sylvan Isis, the guardian of the dead. The embowered enclosure, seventy feet square, wherein the "moated grange" once stood, is striking in its desolation. Ash trees have sprung up, matured, and thrown down their arms with thundering sound since the house was dismantled, one hundred and

fifty years ago. Patches of herbage appear rank and rotten, but nothing seems to thrive on that spot once sown with the salt of un-availing tears, and polluted with the blood of the slain. No bird sings; no sound breaks the awful silence. So near, and yet so far from human sight and sympathy, it would seem like a place

"Where no man comes, or hath been
Since the making of the world."

And yet the sounds of song and revelry once rose from this dark, lonely spot. Here groups of merry children played. Here were the varied scenes attending the birth, the bridal, and the burial; and now not one stone left upon another. Like Charles Lamb's lament over the mansion of Blakesmoor, "I had a vague notion that it could not all have perished, that so much solidity with magnificence could not have been crushed all at once into the mere dust and rubbish which I found it."

I know well that Moon's Moat has been the quarry for the repair of neighbouring buildings and roads for generations; but methought there would be some indication of its walls, some foundations to show where hall and tower and oratory stood, for the Moons were ever rigid Romanists; from the knight whose lady still walks beneath the trees on the Eve of St. Agnes to the last of a lordly line who was borne with a crucifix on her breast to Beoley churchyard during the middle of last century.

In the registers the name is variously spelt Moon, Mann and Mane; and being humble relatives of Lord Mohun was the reason probably why a traveller answering to the description of Captain Richard Hill came to the Moat and claimed a welcome in the winter of 1692-3; although with the tragedy that followed I am not able clearly to associate him.

It seems that the fortunes of the Moon family were already on the decline. The house had been dismantled and despoiled by the Parliamentary forces fifty years before, and was then occupied by Joan Moon, widow, her three sons, and their half sister Mariolle, and two old servants, Mark Wheeler and Elizabeth Baggot. Tradition says that a foreign soldier (Hill had served abroad) desired to woo the young lady, and failed to win her regard. He persisted so urgently and craftily that the brothers, who should have been Mariolle's best men, were arrayed against her.

On the 14th of January Thomas Gale, Constable of Beoley, deposeth that "he was crossing the neighbouring pasture on his way to the Holt End when he was amazed by hearing shrill cries from the Moat House, 'Save me, save me, have ye no pity!' as of a woman being murdered. Which cries continuing and waxing louder I turned to the place, and was well nigh at the drawbridge, when there fell or bounded, for soe it seemed, from the leads a living body into the water; at which there was silence for a while, but presently I

heard overhead men's voices muttering and reviling. Feeling assured that a foul deed had been done, and liking not the character of the young masters, I hastened to the village to awaken John Greene and William Bayliss, whose musquots had been left at Henley, so that it was break of day before we could demand entrance in the king's name. Old Mark Wheeler shewed us the chambers, and was that mithered with Christmas ale, we could make nothing on him, but stood swaying his head and fooling like a morris dancer, whilst Mr. William Moon made oath that no such circumstance could be, inasmuch as his sister Mariolle and the others were away in London with Squire Sheldon. Mistress Moon looked scared, though she said nothing. Whereupon, as our duty was, we made diligent quest, and prodded with our staves divers parts of the water without finding aught save a cloak of serge; and yet I verily believe that a wicked deed was done on that night, for Miss Mariolle no more appeared amongst us."

I may add that the suspected tragedy doubtless gave rise to the prophecy which a very old parishioner remembers:—

"When in Moon's dark stagnant moat
Fetter'd hands are seen to float;
When from tangled rushes nigh
Thrice is heard a piercing cry;
When the night winds, whisp'ring, wave
Grasses rank o'er shallow grave,
Life shall cease in court and hall,
Drawbridge rot and roof-tree fall,
Till the tale from pallid lips
Is rehearsed of Moon's eclipse."

It certainly seems strange that its owners became poorer and poorer; the lands were sold, the mansion suffered to decay, until, in 1737, the ancient family of Moon was represented in this deserted house by a solitary half-witted widow, whose poverty and disposition are enshrined in the following rustic rhyme, still repeated:—

"Milk and water sold I ever,
Weight and measure made I never."

II.

CAPTAIN RICHARD HILL hears that efforts are being made to smooth the way for his return to town. The father of Mrs. Mountford, Mr. Percival, has got into a mess, having, according to one account, been found guilty of "clipping," but the generally received opinion is that he was concerned in the nefarious plot to assassinate King William. At any rate Hill's powerful friends join in a successful intercession to the Queen, and Percival is pardoned on condition that the widow Mountford shall cease her efforts to bring her husband's murderer to

justice. But in London "there is no room of safety for Octavius yet," and the villain of the piece has still to wander uneasily up and down the world's stage, with the worm of conscience gnawing at his heart. Within eight miles of Moon's Moat is Alcester, where he boldly rides up to the chief posting-house, The Angel, and receives sundry letters addressed to him as Captain Richards; and it is by two of these letters, now tattered and blurred, that I connect him with the startling scenes which follow.

Captain Richards was a handsome fellow, in spite of a deep scar on his cheek, and particularly taking with strangers by reason of the genial abandon of his manners and conversation; but how he became intimate with the sedate townfolk of Alcester, and was included in the invitation to a kind of housewarming I cannot imagine.

But so it was. The heir to the old family of Pumphrey had recently improved the quaint dwelling still standing near the town-hall by the addition of an upper room of handsome proportions and ornamentation. The minutely carved woodwork is beautiful in older parts of the house, but this room is especially noticeable from association. The dark, heavily-moulded panels, with a border of white, the stately folding-doors, the deeply-cut cornice, enriched with cornucopiæ, scattering fruits and flowers of tempting fulness; the lofty ceiling, with its oval centre-piece bordered by the mystic letters *LET*, and the date 1688; reminding us that well nigh two hundred years have rushed past with noiseless wings since first the polished floor gave back the sound of nimble feet, and friends and neighbours met together to rejoice that "a bloodless revolution saved the land."

Very jovial was that party in January, 1693, at which Captain Richards was present. The gentlemen, in their laced coats, velvet breeches, and faultless furbelows; the ladies in braided bodices, high heeled shoes and ample skirts, shortly to be developed into the hooped petticoats. Each gentleman upon entering made a low bow, then saluted the ladies all round; and Captain Richards led off one of the fairest in the noted dance, Moll Patley, after which followed the more stately minuet and rigadon.

But the Captain soon slipped into the adjoining room, where whisk and lautre loo were in full force, and where he was soon roused to anger by being likened to the knave of clubs. Inflamed with passion and wine, he drew his sword, but was overpowered and put outside the door, when he retired to The Angel Inn opposite, vowing vengeance.

The Angel has for centuries been identified with the ancient town of Alcester; for this was the hostelry which, under the especial protection of the church, received the overflow of visitors to the various monastic buildings near, when such came to worship at the shrine of St. Faith. And although the original has long disappeared, there are parts of the present house which may have been in existence when Baxter was prophesying "lamentation and mourning and

woe" under the adjacent town-hall, while the cannon at Edge Hill thundered its interpretation of the text.

To The Angel the Captain retired, the scar on his left cheek reddened like the brand of a felon, with the glow of a fierce fire which he had kindled, and he did not retire to rest; but whether he wrought the vengeance over which he pondered, or suffered in the attempt to inflict suffering upon others, I can only infer from the extraordinary and mysterious circumstances which have come under my observation, and which have caused so great a sensation in the neighbourhood.

Of Captain Richards, alias Captain Richard Hill presumably, in the habit in which he lived I may have much to say; but of the same mortal of flesh and blood who was supposed to have left The Angel in February, 1693, I know nothing further than by conjecture. I say *supposed* to have left, for unless I can be more fully informed, I am strongly inclined to believe that the remains of this persona ingrata still moulder in our midst.

Probably about this time The Angel became known as the haunted inn, but not until many years afterwards—namely, 1820—do I discover any reason for the belief.

The landlady then was Mistress Hancock, a shrewd, strong-minded woman, well fitted for her position, and not likely to be led away by idle fancies. A chambermaid named Clarson seems to have been repeatedly frightened during the dark hours, and was attended by a surgeon living just above, for hysteria; and shortly afterwards becoming worse, left. Her successor saw and heard nothing, so that Mrs. Hancock was well pleased to give out that the whole thing was a delusion, or, as she described it, "a parcel of nonsense."

Time passed, leading that generation into the land of shadows, and with the exception of an occasional reference to the old traditions by the habitués of the smoking-room, and the unconquerable aversion of the servants to be left alone in the dark, nothing occurred to identify the gloomy rooms with ghostly visitants.

A discovery was made, however, in 1837, somewhat suggestive. A large oven, closed, and bricked up many years ago when a kitchen was converted into a sitting-room, was found to contain a rough oblong box, with an anchor burnt in the lid and two swords crossed beneath. Inside were the tarnished trappings of what had once been a loose military cloak, or roquelaure, together with a low-crowned felt hat, with broad brim once turned up at the sides, and ornamented with feathers; small shoe buckles, yellow vest, woven with gold, an empty snuff-box, smelling strongly of bergamot, and two almost illegible letters relating to a loan, one of them signed P. or R. Macartney, and the other written in French, F. Vandille; both being addressed "Captain Richards, to be left with Mr. Butler, Aulcester, Warwick."

The discovery of these remnants of forgotten frivolity had well-nigh passed into oblivion when a family occupying part of The Angel Inn,

recently turned into a private house, were astounded by such strange manifestations as left no room for doubt that the place was haunted. It may be that, as a cannon fired over the water brings the body to the surface, so the noise and vibration of the workmen in altering the house loosed some sombre spirit from its moorings, and gave increased activity to its midnight wandering.

"My husband and I were in bed," said my informant, a lady well known in Alcester, "when it seemed as if a heavy body had suddenly fallen against the door, straining the panels, and causing the framework to shake and rattle. He at once got up, thinking an invalid lady in an adjoining room was seeking help, but there was nothing. Carefully closing the door, he retired. Again the same vehement pressure and rattling, and this was repeated at intervals.

"I was now thoroughly roused," said she, "and waited, with awful trembling and chilliness at the heart, the dénouement. With no further noise, but with the fitful fervour of a gust of wind, the door opened to its full extent, and I became conscious that some *thing* had entered. Some *thing*, I say, for we had no light, and were really too unnerved to find one. And yet how can I describe my tremor and my agony, as I lay helpless and motionless, wildly staring into vacancy, expecting every moment to be in the grasp of a power not revealed? That power betrayed its presence. I distinctly heard some brass handles to the chest of drawers click against the woodwork as if a body brushed by. It was coming nearer, for the wardrobe, which leant forward on the uneven floor, was thrust back against the wall; nearer still, when the chair by the bedside rocked violently. And now overhead, following the rustle of the drapery, came the only sound we heard: a hissing sound, as of one breathing heavily; and then a low, mocking 'ha-ha!' enough to curdle the blood in one's veins; after which there was a heavy thud against the cupboard door, exactly over the long-concealed oven, and we were left alone."

The invalid occupant of the adjoining room, who is rather deaf, had been so often and so strangely alarmed that she always used a night-light. She was forcibly made aware that

"The spirit world around this world of ours
Floats like an atmosphere, and everywhere
Wafts thro' these earthly mists and vapours dense
A vital breath of more ethereal air."

Upon retiring one evening the chamber door, usually on the jar, closed at her approach, neither could it be opened without assistance; and during the effort to open it, the impression was exactly as if a powerful body pressed from within, causing a constant jarring of the upper part of the door against the lintel. The lady has also been repeatedly disturbed by what she deemed a faint sibilation overhead, and in the dim light she has twice seen what she describes as a tremulous mist, oval in shape, gliding along the room until it faded in

the recess to the right of the fireplace. Wherever it paused the furniture near shook and rattled.

Perhaps the most startling phenomena was observable on that evening when she entered the room hastily and took an ordinary cane chair at the foot of the bed. When sitting down she was conscious of pressing upon something which yielded like an air cushion with a sound as of a heavy sigh, and immediately the body, or what it was, seemed to re-form, and brush past like wings so abruptly that the candle was blown out, and she regained the sitting-room, feeling, as she says, more dead than alive.

But the apparition (for I no longer hesitate thus to call it) assumed a more definite shape outside the building. Between that and the adjoining house is a long, wedge-like, cul-de-sac, formed by the acute angles of outer walls. Here daylight never enters, and one feels—

“A silence and a stirless breath
That neither is of life nor death.”

Here, in December, 1825, a servant-girl, throwing down a peck of oyster-shells after supper, was so affrighted by a man in armour that she fainted right away; and here also, during the past year, has been seen, bending over a heap of rubbish at the further end, a tall figure dressed in a habit unknown to living men.

It may be readily imagined that appearances and disturbances so startling, and authenticated beyond all manner of doubt, became the talk, not only of our tea-table coterie, but of the whole town, and everybody was asking, “Is there anything fresh?” To one, therefore, like myself, who has made the subject of apparitions an especial study during many years, and who puts all evidence of the supernatural into the crucible of analysis, the opportunity seemed favourable for testing a peculiar theory.

There is something very natural in the ardent wish of many who have left this earthly stage just to lift the trap-door, and when the theatre is deserted, and “all the breathers of this world are still,” to gaze in the twilight upon the scene of past triumphs and trials. And I may add, after the fullest scrutiny and enquiry, I verily believe that two instances, at least, of apparitions—namely, that seen by the Wesleys in their retired parsonage, and the one relating to the death of the wicked Lord Lyttelton—are as well authenticated as anything ever recorded of the supernatural.

It may be noticed that, generally speaking, only those who have met with sudden or violent deaths, or who have been strikingly wicked, are said to reappear. May not this be owing to the former being transfixed by a certain strong earth-life at the moment of death, and the latter being impelled earthwards by the gravitation of gross minds towards the centre of their wickedness. If it be true that—

“Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,
Unseen both when we wake and when we sleep,”

I can only account for their infrequent appearance by supposing that, as the old Greeks were colour blind, we are insensible to the volatile ether in which such spirits are clothed.

Then again, not only is darkness usually needed to bring out the spectral image, but, like mesmerism or other occult science, a sympathetic subject is a *sine quâ non*.

Such I doubt not was my informant. Listening to her account of the above appearances—so strange, so weird, so thrilling—I involuntarily shuddered and shivered, as if the spectre passed before me, and I heard the hiss of its mocking laugh. Surely some super-sensitiveness to other world influence, some spiritual affinity otherwise than of character, enabled her to behold this wanderer from the vast unseen cycles of existence, who has been ever struggling to break the eternal silence and to breathe his guilt to humankind.

The house soon became empty ; I need hardly say why ; and when going over it, I noticed that a window fairly near the ground remained unfastened, and I determined to brave the horrors of a night spent alone in a haunted house.

Wednesday, the 26th of March, 1884, a cold, dark night, was the time chosen ; and I had no difficulty in entering without observation the front room, about sixteen feet square, which in the good old coaching days was reserved for travellers. In the corner was the highly polished Queen Anne fireplace, round which the fresh arrivals would gather and tell of hair-breadth escapes on the road, and what was doing in great London town ; but the cracked and bleared picture on a panel over it, which excited my curiosity when a child, was gone. Passing up the dark oaken staircase, with its quaintly-carved balustrades, to the first floor, I took my station in a bedroom dimly lighted by two narrow windows with heavy mullions ; the glass yellow with age. I was not quite alone, an old and faithful dog being by my side. As I lay on the rug and air cushion which I had brought, softly and slowly, not to awaken the long sleepers, each under a green coverlet below, the old church clock tolled the hour of midnight. Thus gently has it spoken to the listening town for nearly two hundred and fifty years ; thus will it speak, reader, when you and I are among the shadows which we so fear.

To say that I had heard nothing would be a mistake. It seems a way with these old houses to keep a discreet silence during daylight, and then at night, when nobody can contradict, to give full vent to their creaks and strains, and unaccountable protests against humanity. When one stair begins to complain of undue pressure, another must snappishly follow its leader ; when one door bangs with a booming sound, its cousin, fifty feet removed, must exclaim, "That's nothing ; hear my bang ;" and when a huge chimney mutters and shakes its sooty sides on to the floor, in the effort to make a clean breast of it, the rusty vane on a cowl afar off must give a

responsive shriek, as it turns to all points of the compass for sympathy.

So mysterious were these noises that twice I groped my way to the attics, and, throwing back a square lid, listened to the revelry of the rats in the roof. Holding somewhat to the theory that the power of the will can exercise a magnetic influence upon the person thought of, I concentrated my thoughts upon him whom I deemed the apparition to represent, and so thinking must have dozed. I certainly was not prepared for what follows, and has caused so much excitement in our social circle, that, to prevent further exaggeration, I hasten to repeat it.

Shortly after one o'clock, when in that passive state between sleeping and waking, I was startled by a low prolonged growl from my dog. Dimly conscious of a faint, luminous centre, reason for a moment associated it with a night-light in my own room; then came reflection, and remembering where I was, I felt as in a nightmare, tongue-tied from fright. Almost immediately there came a sound which I can never forget; beginning like the wintry wind passing through the withered leaves of an oak, it ended in a series of short guttural sounds which might be taken for a mocking laugh.

It is said that sudden fear paralyses the senses, otherwise how could I gaze without horror at the scene before me? There, with a kind of amber phosphorescence, revealing the outline, stood, or rather floated, the image of a man. A long cloak of dark material, and rough, large boots were all that appeared of the figure: but the face—ah, the face even now comes back to me with terrible distinctness. The hair had been closely cropped and the face was ghastly pale, but a streak, red as vermillion, gave a hideous grotesqueness to the left cheek. The eyes, which were large and luminous, followed me with what seemed beseeching earnestness; but what was that over the mouth? Had Burke and Hare been anticipated in their fiendish practice? Had the murderer himself fallen a victim? I now understood the cause of the peculiar hissing sound I had heard, and I shuddered.

Even then I thought my senses were weaving strange fancies in the brain; but one glance at my dog was sufficient. His eyes gleamed like fire, his body quivered with emotion, and with half a moan, half a cry, he crouched and pressed against me, fixedly staring as if fascinated by the spectre. No further confirmation was needed.

With an impulse that was madness; with a daring begotten by the continual consciousness that we are such stuff as dreams are made of; I moved towards the apparition, and actually touched with outspread hand the wall immediately behind it.

But here comes the amazing fact. I was yet conscious of passing through an impalpable presence. The sharp sound and the repulsion threw me back, and then I saw the spectre reform: but now it seemed strangely agitated, passing hither and thither with restless eagerness, and causing a current of air as if fanned by invisible

wings ; and still at intervals the same heavy spasmodic breathing, more appalling than aught else. At length I managed to articulate : "Are you Captain Richard Hill?" The breathing ceased and the spectre was stationary.

"Are you at rest ; and what do you want?"

The features were strangely contorted, and the eyes shone as balls of fire : whilst a low hiss, as of a serpent disturbed in its lair, was all the response.

"I fear to ask, but can you—*will* you speak?"

At this entreaty there was plainly a convulsive effort ; the face seemed to expand, a gurgling sound like a stifled cry followed. For the first time I saw a small hand, delicate as that of a woman, raised to the mouth, and then I was alone.

This I knew at once by my dog. He rose, shook himself and caressed me, as much as to say, "Master, the danger is over."

I came away as one in wonderland. The adventure became known. People yearn to hear further particulars, but I can only give without comment this startling narrative of facts.

GOOD-BYE !

SET the door open wide into the night,
Where the stars burn, sharp points of frosty light.

One that we know is bound afar, alone,
Into a distant land beyond our sight.

He came to us a child of gladsome spring,
A lusty youth in summer's garlanding,

And, with the ripening corn to manhood grown,
He toiled with us thro' autumn's harvesting.

Now all the golden fields lie plucked and bare,
The thin woods shiver in the winter air ;

'Tis not a night to quit warm fire and friend—
Yet he must go and leave an empty chair !

Our talk runs high, with many a jest and song,
But still an undertone does laughter wrong ;

Those laugh the best whose laugh is for the end—
And well we know that tears must come ere long.

Into a distant land beyond our ken,
Whither have passed the hopes of many men,

Fresh springs, full summers, autumn's garnered store ;
Whence come no signs of life or love again :

He too must go ! in vain we close him round,
Nor yet may follow whither he is bound :

We stand alone beside the open door—
And the toll'd church bell gives no further sound !

G. B. STUART.

HOW IT CAME THERE.

Founded on Fact.

BY CONSTANCE MCEWEN.

"NOW you will come into my own little workshop, and then you will have got over all the sight-seeing," said Captain Featherstonhaugh, bending tenderly towards the lady at his side. "Preliminaries are very fatiguing, I know, to *our sort*," he went on humorously. "Introductions to sisters, aunts and cousins, and all the 'sugar' and 'salt' that accompanies an engagement; beginning with a kiss from aunt Miriam, and ending with a present from the housekeeper. Still we are getting on very well, you must allow. You have been here just—let me see." And Captain Featherstonhaugh took out his watch and looked at the time. "Just two hours. In that compass you have been stared up and down by the Mater, Pater, and future sisters-in-law, and come through it all like a statue. Even aunt Miriam's kiss didn't melt you."

"I'm very odd, I know," laughed Miss Boscowitch, tossing aside the white Russian furs which enveloped her. "I want a new sensation. I read people off like story books, and it's always the same story. The only difference is in the binding."

"I very well like the binding of *this* book," said Captain Featherstonhaugh, still more tenderly.

"Pretty speeches," said Miss Boscowitch, looking rather absently out of the window, "never mean very much."

"How cold you are!" said Captain Featherstonhaugh. "One would think that you had had some absorbing attachment before—only I know that to be impossible."

"Why impossible?" said Miss Boscowitch, throwing herself into an American rocking-chair, and lazily setting it in motion.

"Because you would have told me," said he, humbly. "I should have liked you all the better for it."

Miss Boscowitch made no reply, but turned a large emerald ring, which graced the third finger of her left hand, rather uncomfortably round and round.

The man who stood before her was the most desirable of men, and up to the moment of entering that workshop—as he chose to call the long, low, luxuriously-furnished room, which was appropriated to him at Steppe Castle—she had believed that the dreams of other days had glided out of memory's reach. What vibration from the wing of Destiny had touched her *now*? What mystic chord had the last few minutes spent in this room set in motion?

They had met at the house of a mutual friend that summer; the mutual friend being, in this instance, one of those unselfish indi-

viduals called matchmakers, aiding and abetting the promotion of others' happiness with a hearty satisfaction. And it was while Donald, the champion dancer at the Blair Athole games, was executing a series of bewildering steps, that Captain Featherstonhaugh had assured Miss Boscowitch of his devotion, and been assured in his turn of its acceptance. And now she had come to stay at the romantic castle of Steppe, in Perthshire, to be introduced to the family of the man whom she was about to marry.

"Did you ever care for anybody before?" said Captain Featherstonhaugh, still humbly.

"Did you?" said Miss Boscowitch, with a sudden flash of gaiety.

"You are evading the question," said Captain Featherstonhaugh.

"My dear Hugh," said Miss Boscowitch, laying a very pretty hand on the young man's shoulder, "when I was at school I hated Mangnall's questions. I never could answer one of them. *Please* don't be as tiresome as old Mangnall. Show me your treasures?"

Captain Featherstonhaugh was head over ears in love with this subtle, sophisticated, graceful girl, who was indebted to her half Russian parentage for her easy method of turning his questions just the roads she desired, and throwing such a brilliant light on the breathing, palpitating present, that the poor shrouded ghosts of the past must needs have no presence there.

"What shall I show you first?" he said, drawing her hand within his arm. "I've made collections of all sorts of bric-à-brac."

"Show me your bomerangs, and dirks, and assegais," she said, laughing.

"Little savage," returned he, that soft light, which is love's peculiarity, illuminating each strongly marked feature. "Come! I will show you something romantic enough! Something which is more human than an assegai. Something I have often puzzled over, and in my own clumsy fashion twisted many a little story out of."

Captain Featherstonhaugh moved away to a curious oak cabinet, which completely filled a deep recess at the end of the room, and after fumbling in his pocket for a key, unlocked a drawer, the contents of which he commenced to turn over, whistling an old negro melody as a sort of accompaniment to his search.

Miss Boscowitch did not follow him. She remained at the mantelpiece, idly touching first one little curio, then another, not wholly happy nor wholly sad; the normal condition of the many.

"Ah! here it is!" came from the other end of the room, in Captain Featherstonhaugh's musical baritone.

He was standing facing Miss Boscowitch now, and shaking something gaily at her.

"I was determined not to lose it," he continued. "Who knows? Some day I may find the owner." As he spoke he came striding towards the mantelpiece, where Miss Boscowitch still stood with her air of indolent grace.

In his hand he held an ordinary runaway match-box, which, with a half amused smile, Miss Boscowitch held out her hand to receive.

Captain Featherstonhaugh hesitated a moment, then gave it her.

"Well! what's in it?" she said. "Matches, I suppose! Hugh, I believe you are playing a joke off on me." And then she drew the box from the lid, and saw within a little crumpled, stiffened, blood-stained white kid glove.

As the kid came into contact with the palm of her hand she turned deadly white. A question seemed to form itself on lip and eye, but no words came.

"How did it come there?" said Captain Featherstonhaugh, taking the glove from her passive hand. "Why don't you ask, Bertie?"

"Tell me," she said, simply.

"Of course you know how narrowly I escaped the massacre of Isandlana?" said Captain Featherstonhaugh. "The first battalion of the 2nd Regiment was, as you know, cut to pieces."

"Yes," said Miss Boscowitch, mechanically.

"I was sent with a party of officers to identify, if possible, the slain," he went on. "On the bare, bleak field lay the bodies of a score of men I had known and loved. To identify them, for the most part, was all but impossible. I saw a photograph of Lady X—— lying near a wrecked tent; I picked up a ring——"

Captain Featherstonhaugh paused; he put his right foot meditatively on the fender, and gazed at the logs of pine which were blazing merrily and contrasting comfortably with the chill autumnal light, which touched the outside landscape with its own peculiar beauty. Miss Boscowitch had never stirred from the position into which she had sunk.

"I found the glove," he continued, meditatively, "lying at the side of an officer bathed in his blood. The name of the officer was——"

Miss Boscowitch had risen with a despairing cry.

"*Was?*" she gasped.

"What does it matter to you, Bertie?" said Captain Featherstonhaugh. "Why do you look like that? What possesses you?"

But she caught his arm, and her eyes sought his so wildly, whilst her lips repeated that one word *Was* so entreatingly, that Captain Featherstonhaugh forgot his surprise and dawning wrath in fear for her.

"Trelawny," he said, hastily.

"*Trelawny!*" As if reiteration were needed! "I knew it! I felt it! Oh, my love! This was *my* glove!" she exclaimed, in deep emotion, and then she fell back into the rocking-chair and sobbed as if her heart would break.

Looking at the bowed figure of the girl before him, Captain Featherstonhaugh felt that strange mixture of sentiments which spring from a sudden shock. Love and anger fought hard for the

mastery within him. He had told her, but a little before, if she had loved before, it would only make her even dearer to him. *Was it so?* A surging, tempestuous passion of words came sweeping upward to his lips. Why had she not told him the mystery of this glove? He moved away from her, and gazed out with a mighty effort, born of a strong control.

On the rough, wild, solitary moorlands which were stretching away for miles, a couple of large birds were taking lazy flight in that direction. He seemed to hear the beat of their wings. He was taking in each detail of the well-known scene of his home life with that sharpness of sense which is born of a new experience, whether of pleasure or pain.

Between himself and this girl he so loved, lay this small, white, blood-stained glove. Destiny had kept it safely locked away in its odd receptacle, to bring it forth at the moment of his newly-found joy; to rob him of its sweetness, by the torture of this sad yet in some sort gracious memory.

It was Miss Boscowitch who broke the stillness that seemed to fill the room after the first wild paroxysm of her grief had passed.

"The glove is mine," she said, brokenly. "I gave it to Captain Trelawny, to whom I was engaged, on the eve of his departure for that terrible campaign. He was to keep it always, carry it into the field of battle, and, on his happy return, it was to be an everlasting witness and badge of our love. I had not forgotten; but I had let the present overlay the past, and now, to-day, as if it were meant, I am met on the very threshold of your home by this strange, taunting question—How did it come there? I ask it painfully, Hugh—Why did it come there?"

Still not looking at Miss Boscowitch, Captain Featherstonhaugh moved and picked up the poor little glove, which lay at her feet. Anger and love had fought hard within him, and love had won the day.

"Did you really love him?" he asked, very sadly.

"Not as I love you—oh, not as I love you," she cried, rising and clinging to him. "I thought I loved him, Hugh; but when I met you, then I knew that I had never really loved Arthur Trelawny."

He bowed his tall form before her, perhaps in homage, perhaps to hide the emotion which overpowered him.

"Bertie, will you let me keep the glove?" he whispered. "It shall be sacred; shall bind us more closely together. Whether you loved him or not, this must be a sorrow to you. Make this sorrow as much yours as mine, love, as much mine as yours."

Miss Boscowitch could not reply then; but after a little, in this new, strange, subtle note of sympathy, she ceased to wonder—why it had come there.

A SECOND-HAND GOWN.

I.

IT was somewhere about six o'clock on a late May evening. Colonel Hunter was pacing restlessly up and down the short, broad gravelled terrace on which one of the long drawing-room windows opened. Judging by the erratic manner in which he alternately strode and stood, and the irritation with which he impatiently tapped the ashes from his pipe against the old sun-dial, he was decidedly out of temper.

He had just returned from an afternoon's calling expedition with his wife. To a man of his sociable temperament, living in one of the quietest of country neighbourhoods, this was usually a most pleasant experience. Certainly the neighbours were very few and very commonplace. Two or three families at a distance of some seven miles apart, and the large village of Swire, with its vicar, doctor, and lawyer, formed the whole of the most select society. But since Colonel Hunter had retired from the army, married, and generally "settled down," he seemed to prefer a quiet life, and to find all the amusement he needed in farming the property he had bought, in the moderate sport that the district afforded, and in the discussion with his neighbours of the few occurrences of local importance and interest.

But a new element had lately disturbed and unsettled this united little clique. Some three months ago rumour had arisen that Swire Cottage had been taken, and was being completely re-papered and painted. The ladies of the village had watched, with a considerable amount of interest, the arrival of two huge, lumbering furniture vans; and Mrs. Spence, the lawyer's wife, who had slipped into the Cottage to reconnoitre, had been able to report of such stores of furniture, of carpets and curtains of such a quality, as argued the owners to be of no small importance.

Nevertheless, when Mr. and Mrs. Gray, a young, newly-married couple, good-looking, totally without introductions, and apparently without friends or belongings in the neighbourhood, finally arrived at Swire Cottage, there was considerable hesitation among the best families as to whether they should be called upon or not.

Mrs. Hunter, who, in the absence of a resident squire at Swire, had constituted herself chief lady of the parish, held her ground firmly for some time. Heaven knew what kind of impostors the new comers might be! Where were they from? What did they want at Swire? Their name was Gray—well, anybody might be a Gray—and in the absence of Sir James Hastings, and now that her dear friend, his lamented mother, was dead, she felt it her duty to keep up the tone of the place. These remarks, being unanswerable,

naturally carried weight. Besides which, Mrs. Hunter's friendship abroad with the late Lady Hastings and her son (who for many years before the demise of the former had wandered about the Continent) though a fact which rested solely on her own testimony, gave her a claim to be heard, and a prestige of which she made frequent use.

But one day her husband burst into the drawing-room in a state of evident excitement. He had been over to Swire, to call on the Vicar, and for the first time he met Mr. and Mrs. Gray in the village.

"And Harriet, who do you think Mrs. Gray is?" he had eagerly asked his wife. "My good Lionel, it is impossible for me to tell," she had coolly replied; "probably some rich self-made man's daughter from a manufacturing place—some mill-owner." For it was already well known that there was no want of money at the Cottage.

"Not at all, not at all!" her husband had triumphantly replied, "She's pretty Miss Miles, whom I used to know at Pau! Surely I have often told you of her—Evelyn Miles? We had quite a long talk about old days, and I've promised that you shall go and call on her immediately."

Mrs. Hunter's face flushed. If retreat from her set-up opinions was indeed inevitable, it was for her to sound it, not her husband. She was not exactly a jealous woman; but when a man of forty marries a woman some few years his senior, with a good property of her own, the world is narrow-minded enough to refuse belief that it can be a love-match. And this had always rankled in Mrs. Hunter's mind. She felt, therefore, an instinctive, and perhaps unreasonable objection to her husband finding an old friend in pretty Mrs. Gray.

It was with a bad grace, and with her stiffest and most dignified air, that she had that afternoon accompanied Colonel Hunter to Swire Cottage; and this manner, instead of wearing off under the kindly welcome and pretty friendliness of young Mrs. Gray, had, to her husband's great annoyance, so increased and apparently hardened during the call that at parting it had amounted to an almost repellant hauteur.

So meditated Colonel Hunter as he now paced the terrace with a grave and anxious countenance. He had wished that these two women might have been friends. True, he had loved Evelyn Miles as he had never loved any other woman. Through the long sunny Pau winter he had been constantly thrown with the young and beautiful girl, who had scarcely yet made her *début*. An orphan of good family, yet penniless, and in charge of a good-natured uncle and aunt, who were very old friends of Colonel Hunter, she had appealed in every way to his romantic and generous nature. During their long rides over the Couteaux, in the little expeditions they had planned together, through the many evenings so quietly and happily spent at the Villa Pignotti, Colonel Hunter, though, as he reasoned with himself, almost old enough to be Evelyn's father, had learnt to love, and to love passionately. Through five months he had kept his secret well, and had

borne nobly with the treatment, as of a trusted old bachelor-friend, that Evelyn and her uncle and aunt had given him. And then it all came out—how he scarcely knew. But he remembered now, as though it were but yesterday, first the frightened and then the sorrowful look on the young girl's face, the tears that streamed down her cheeks as she seized his hand in both of hers, and begged him to forgive all the pain she had so unknowingly inflicted on her "dear old friend."

After that things were confused. He remembered a rapid journey into Italy, some months of wandering there, and he had then accepted the invitation of a friend to join a summer-party for Norway.

Harriet Conway had been one of the party, and she was cut out for him, his friend said. Fair and phlegmatic, never out of temper, never too weary, a perfect—almost too perfect—a lady, and with plenty of money of her own, what more could a man desire? She made no difficulties or bother, and a year after the great experience of his life at Pau he found himself married and settled down at Swire Old House.

And now, above all things he must keep from Harriet the knowledge of that great experience. He could trust Evelyn perfectly; that much he had learnt from her glad look when he told her of his marriage in the village street, and from the frank, unembarrassed way in which she had treated him. His wife could have no grounds for suspicion from anything in Mrs. Gray's manner. What then could account for her incomprehensible behaviour that afternoon? There could be only one reason, and it was the thought of that which furrowed Colonel Hunter's brow, and accounted for the viciousness with which he bit his pipe-stem.

A miserable reason! A most unfortunate piece of ill-luck! What could have induced Evelyn to wear that confounded dress—just that special afternoon that they were calling? Was it possible that her aunt never told her of the giver! He remembered clearly how earnestly he had begged Mrs. Miles to relieve him of the strange and beautiful Indian silk, with its peculiarly scrolled pattern, that he had bought in a lot at the sale of the cargo of a ship at Aden. The good lady had at first refused; but afterwards, being over-persuaded by the Colonel's entreaties and reproaches, and, perhaps, by the sight of the silk itself, she had relented, and accepted a portion on her niece's behalf. So far so good, and Harriet, his wife, could never have divined from whence Mrs. Gray's dress had come, had it not been that barely six months ago Colonel Hunter, in looking over some chests, had come upon the remainder of the bale, and forthwith given it to his wife, telling her good-humouredly, that it would make her a "fine frock."

Could it be possible that Mrs. Hunter had recognised, and with a woman's penetration traced, the identity of the source of both gowns, and all the consequences Mrs. Gray's possession of such a gift from her husband might involve?

Meanwhile Mrs. Hunter stood at her bedroom window, and watched her unconscious husband as he walked on the terrace below.

She was a tall, handsome woman of forty-six. Her face was clearly cut, and as a rule almost colourless; but just now her cheeks were slightly flushed, and her manner betrayed an unusual mood. Bright, small, real grey eyes were planted very near the rise of a cool, thin, aquiline nose. Her lips were also thin, but not ill-tempered. Her thick, fair, straight hair, small white teeth, and perfectly unlined face, made her appear quite ten years younger than she really was. She was stout, without being fat, and was very handsomely dressed. None of Mrs. Hunter's friends had ever seen her out of temper; but now her large, well-shaped white hands grasped nervously at the ornaments of the dressing-table, and she occasionally murmured to herself in vexation.

She must have so stood, almost motionless and intently watching her husband, for at least a quarter of an hour, when with a sudden movement, as though her mind was finally made up, and with a last anxious look at the walker below, she abruptly left the window.

She hurried across the bedroom and through a little dressing-room adjoining, which led into a tastefully-furnished boudoir. The room was at the side of the house, and commanded a wide view over the park ground, hemmed in to the left by a pretty copse of spruce-firs and other trees. But the landscape had no beauties for Mrs. Hunter this evening. She rang the bell sharply, and then sank, with a worried air, into a great easy-chair beside the window, as her maid entered.

"You're always late now, Frilling," she said captiously; "I ought to have begun to dress for dinner long ago."

"I beg pardon, ma'am, it's scarcely seven o'clock."

"Always an answer ready! And you know how I particularly dislike that kind of thing. Why have you left the windows open so late? Quite enough to give me my death of cold."

Frilling glanced enquiringly at her mistress, and deemed it wiser not to remind her that she had given orders that the boudoir window was never to be shut before dressing-time. She wondered what could have happened to put so even-tempered a lady out of sorts.

There was a pause of silence, which Mrs. Hunter broke. "Frilling!" said she, suddenly, "Do you remember that roll of curious Indian silk which the Colonel gave me about six months ago?"

"Of course I do, ma'am," was the discreetly simple reply.

"Well, do you remember what became of it?" pursued her mistress. It was a disagreeable subject, very—and one she did not care to refer to, but she must get at the bottom of the matter, and discover from whence Mrs. Gray had procured the silk dress she had worn that day.

"You gave it to me, ma'am," said Frilling, treading her ground carefully, and not quite sure how much or how little of the incident she was expected to remember.

"Nonsense," retorted the lady sharply, "that's one of your shifty ways. You know all about it as well as I do, if you only choose to think a moment. I gave it to you to sell for me when Jeanne sent in that monstrous bill. I had scarcely a penny by me. I want to know, Frilling, what you did with it."

Finding, to her great surprise, that it was really the whole truth which was wanted of her, Frilling spoke up with courage.

"I took it to Mr. Jacobs, a friend of mine, ma'am, and he bought it of me, and gave me £10, I think it was the money, if you remember, ma'am, for it, and said he'd never come across such a beautiful stuff in all his life, and never seen the like of it; he admired those funny scrolls and dragons so much. A good bargain he got of it too, ma'am, for he ——"

"Hush! tut!" interrupted Mrs. Hunter, impatiently. "Who cares for that? This Mr. Jacobs, what is he? A pawnbroker?"

"Well, ma'am, I don't think that you would just call him a pawnbroker only; he's a——"

"Well, well. A dealer in second-hand clothing, and such like?"

"Not only that neither, ma'am. You see he's a gentleman of considerable prop ——"

"Rubbish, girl. Why can't you be straightforward for once in your life? I see what the man is, perfectly, and you can call him what you like. The long and the short of the matter is, that you sold the silk to a pawnbroker. And perhaps, Frilling, it was the best thing you could do with it."

Then Mrs. Hunter rose to dress for dinner, with the consciousness of a triumph without sweetness.

II.

DINNER, that stately meal, was passed. The servants had finally quitted the room, and Colonel and Mrs. Hunter were left alone, with only the mild intervention of the dessert and flowers possible.

The conversation, which had struggled to maintain its interest on ordinary, threadbare subjects, now flagged altogether, and it was a silence of several very long minutes that Colonel Hunter broke with the question which had been on his lips for the last hour.

"Well, Harriet! And what do you think of the Grays?"

The very atmosphere of the room seemed suddenly changed and laden with interest. Mrs. Hunter paused slightly before replying:

"My dear, I can never give an opinion in the off-hand kind of manner you wish. But I dare say they are very good sort of people—in their way."

"What do you mean by 'in their way,' Harriet?" said the Colonel, ready to take offence. "Their way is our way, I suppose, and most other people's way."

Mrs. Hunter smiled pityingly at her husband.

"No; there I don't agree with you. Mr. Gray seems a tolerably gentlemanlike young man, and Mrs. Gray is very pretty, but she——"

Colonel Hunter waited impatiently for his wife to finish her sentence. He cracked more nuts than it was possible or even likely that he could eat, and when well surrounded by the fragments and powder of their shells looked up.

"Go on—I'm waiting. 'But she' what?"

Mrs. Hunter gave the little jerk forward to her body and tip backward to her chair that was preparatory to her leaving the table.

"I don't like to say it. You will probably be offended. But a man's bachelor friends" (coaxingly) "are so different! Of course, it doesn't matter who he knows then. I am sure," suddenly changing her tactics, "that you yourself will own you do not wish *me* to be too intimate with these Grays."

Colonel Hunter flushed quickly, and began with warmth: "There is nothing"—But he checked himself, and after a short, awkward silence, continued:

"I don't understand you women, Harriet. I don't quite see what you're driving at. When I knew Mrs. Gray as Miss Miles, she always appeared to me to be perfect. And you—you seem to insinuate that she's not—that she's not, in fact, what you would call 'quite the thing.'"

"That's it," cried Mrs. Hunter, eagerly following up her husband; and so grateful to him for having spared her the disagreeable task of putting unacceptable thoughts into words, that she did not notice the suppressed irritation and irony of his voice. "That's it! You see you're not so dense, after all, Lionel. These people, who seemed to you the pattern of all that was nice and proper before your marriage, you now cannot help looking at with different eyes, and judging by a different standard."

"It's nothing of the kind," shouted the Colonel, roused by this strange misrepresentation of his feelings into an anger that his wife had never before seen. "I look at people with exactly the same eyes. I'm not the least different, nor are they. If Mrs. Gray is not a lady, show it to me! What did she do that was the least unladylike to-day? What was there in her manners, her house, her——?"

He was on the point of adding "her dress," when, with a sudden remembrance, he abruptly pulled himself up, and looked guiltily at his wife.

Mrs. Hunter was gazing straight across at him with a peculiar expression on her handsome face. Truth to tell, she was congratulating herself upon her husband's stupidity, for it was clear to her now that, so far, she was free from the dread of his discovering the fate of the present he had given her in that beautiful silk: he had

not recognized it on Mrs. Gray. But Colonel Hunter could not read his wife's thoughts, and he waited almost breathlessly for her to speak. What did her look mean? Had she discovered all, or was she only suspicious of him? She paused in the act of leaving the table, with her white hands outspread, and lightly touching the snowy cloth with her finger-tips. The tone of her voice when she at last spoke surprised and reassured him. It was conciliatory, even pleading.

"Lionel," she said, gently, "you must allow a woman's superiority of judgment in such matters. There are a thousand little things we women notice, and perhaps I in especial, that you great, good-natured, stupid men never see—things impossible to put into words. Trust me. I shall be perfectly civil to the Grays; but I will not take them up violently, and as leader of the Swire society, I shall do all in my power to prevent other people doing so."

And Mrs. Hunter swept majestically through the dining-room door that her husband had risen to open for her. She felt quite courageous now. The tête-à-tête which she had dreaded as all-important was over. He had evidently noticed nothing in the silk that could compromise her. That being the case, the probabilities were that he would continue unobservant.

But as for poor Colonel Hunter, he returned to his chair and his wine with a wretched feeling of uncertainty for the present, and of certainty of danger in the future. Had his wife noticed Mrs. Gray's dress, drawn her own conclusions, and was she now treating him with a half-contemptuous generosity? The Colonel groaned inwardly. He feared the only course of behaviour open to him was one of proper submission to his lady's will. What would she make of it if she learnt that he had once given Evelyn that lovely dress.

III.

It was a bright June afternoon, one of those delightful days when the sun is not yet sure enough of summer to be too hot, and the cold spring winds are altogether passed.

Mrs. Hunter had been gardening, and was now resting, in a long, low basket chair, which she had turned so as to command a good view of the conservatory, opening out of the drawing-room; and as she reclined in the basket-chair, her hands, with their large gardening-gloves, playing with a blight-brusher, a wide hat on the ground beside her, and a brown holland apron with a protecting bib over her rustling gown, she reflected with some irritation that it was positively monstrous of the Colonel to insist on suspending an Abyssinian head-dress from the Roman lamp which hung in the arch of a recess opposite.

These meditations were unpleasantly interrupted by the sudden announcement of a visitor, and before Mrs. Hunter had time to divest herself completely of her apron and gloves, Mrs. Black entered.

Mrs. Black, as befitted the wife of the country doctor, came in with all due modesty. She was a short, plump little woman, in a gown

which, from the many anxious looks and pats bestowed upon it, was evidently "on" for the first time. Mrs. Black's smiling mouth and ample chin might have convinced all beholders of frankest good-nature, but somehow she rarely gave that impression. Perhaps this was due to a way she had of suddenly turning upon you and asking a leading question, at the same time fixing you with her small, clever eye.

Mrs. Hunter inquired after the health of the seven children, discussed the weather, deplored with her visitor the near advent of the Swire fair, with its accompanying noise and drinking, and reflected to herself with despair that there was not another subject of interest which she shared in common with the doctor's wife.

Suddenly Mrs. Black, turning sharply, inquired of Mrs. Hunter whether she had yet called on the new people at the Cottage.

"Oh dear, yes; of course, it was my duty: I am surprised you had not heard," replied Mrs. Hunter. She was always disconcerted by the sudden movements and questions of the younger lady.

"Yes, I did hear, and I went to call too. What do you think of them, Mrs. Hunter?"

But a kindly chance spared the lady the necessity of an immediate and unconsidered answer. At this moment the door was again opened, and Mrs. Dacres was announced.

There was a great difference between Mrs. Dacres' entrance into a room and that of Mrs. Black. The Vicar's wife was a resolute, good-looking woman of about two or three and thirty, considerably younger than either of the two other ladies. She stepped across the long drawing-room with a firm, light tread, and shook Mrs. Hunter's languid hand warmly. She gave Mrs. Black also much the same greeting, for she had acquired from her husband a good deal of the evenness and suavity of manner necessary in a parish priest. She wore a simple hat and a plain, black gown, looped high up, and showing rather more than is usual of a well-shaped foot and ankle. Her voice was clear if somewhat hard, and bore traces of the leading of the village choir, and perhaps of some of the imperiousness contracted by years of Sunday School teaching. She dropped briskly into a little carved Florentine chair, and began the conversation with vigour.

"Hope I find you quite well, Mrs. Hunter. I've been up seeing your coachman's wife—what a nice, tidy body she is! I couldn't resist dropping in for a little chat with you. Isn't it a charming day, Mrs. Black?"

Now, the Doctor's wife knew from a long and tried experience that when Mrs. Dacres once got the whip-hand in a conversation there was not much chance for anyone else. So, ignoring all preliminary remarks, she brought the stream of talk back at once to the channel in which she wished it to flow.

"We were talking of the Grays, Mrs. Dacres. Of course you have seen them. What do *you* think of them?"

"Oh, they appear to me extremely nice people," was the ready reply. "I have seen quite a lot of them already. Mrs. Gray is going to take the first class of girls for me in the Sunday School. I always felt that a great drag, you know; and now I can keep a sharper look out on the little boys, who are always so noisy and troublesome. I and my husband called at the Cottage directly they came, and they have dined with us, quite quietly, since. Mrs. Gray is a very pretty and charming person, and her husband seems a well-read, clever young man, who has evidently seen a good deal of society. We think them a great acquisition to the neighbourhood—don't you, Mrs. Hunter?"

Mrs. Hunter laughed a little. The Vicar's wife, with her flow of words, had given her time to form a plan of action, and she was now ready with her answer.

"Well, I don't know that I am prepared to be as enthusiastic as you, Mrs. Dacres. I called the other day with my husband; but I confess I put it off as long as I possibly could. And the Grays did not strike me as being anything so *very* special. Very nice sort of people, I daresay. But, you see, coming into the neighbourhood in this mysterious kind of way, without former friends or ties of any kind, one is apt to feel rather suspicious. If my dear friend Lady Hastings were alive, I find myself thinking what would *she* do? She was a very particular woman. And being, so to speak, in her place, I feel I must be very careful how I commit myself. I can assure you that the whole matter is quite a responsibility to me—quite."

"What a load of care will be taken off your mind when young Sir James marries and comes home," remarked Mrs. Black, gazing out on the distant fields. "You must quite long for it."

A shade of vexation crossed Mrs. Hunter's face, but it passed as she replied:

"Yes; but I'm afraid we can't expect that for many years yet. Let me see. He can't be more than five or six and twenty, and young men with plenty of means are never in a hurry to settle down. But how nice it would be to welcome him back! Dear boy! Such a handsome boy as he was, too! His mother was perfectly devoted to him. She would scarcely talk of anything else."

"Ah, you knew them very intimately, did you not?" said Mrs. Black. "Let me think, now," with her sudden movement, and fixing her gaze on Mrs. Hunter, "how many years is it that you've known them?"

"Them? You mean *him*," replied the lady, glad to take advantage of her disagreeable questioner's slip. "It must be quite five years since poor dear Lady Hastings died."

"Yes, yes; I know that," pursued Mrs. Black. "But where did you first know Lady Hastings?"

Mrs. Hunter hastily reviewed in her own mind the possibilities of dressing up, at this moment's notice, her few months' acquaintance

with the late Lady Hastings into the appearance of the life-long friendship it had gradually assumed in the eyes of her neighbours. Mrs. Dacres came unconsciously to the rescue.

"Oh, never mind about that now, Mrs. Black! I thought everyone knew that Mrs. Hunter has known the Hastings' all her life. But tell me," turning to Mrs. Hunter, "what makes you speak of the Grays as though they were questionable? Have you noticed anything strange about them? Mrs. Gray is so very ——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mrs. Hunter, "she's very pretty, and all that, and naturally people will be taken with her. But I must form my own judgment. You know I've travelled a good deal abroad—met many strange people—heard many strange things. No matter. I don't wish to prejudice anyone else against Mrs. Gray. But, personally ——"

"Do you know anything about her? Have you heard anything against her?" eagerly inquired Mrs. Black, leaning forward.

There was an impressive pause, and then Mrs. Hunter answered:

"I don't exactly feel myself at liberty to say what I *have* heard and what I *haven't*. On dits are often misleading. But I *do* know something of her, and I don't care to know much more."

Then Mrs. Dacres, curiously impressed, led the conversation to other matters, and the visitors soon took their leave.

They had scarcely left the drawing-room when Colonel Hunter entered through the long window that opened from the terrace.

"Well, Harriet," he said, good-humouredly, "so you've been holding a reception. I heard you had callers, and when I once distinguished Mrs. Dacres' voice, I thought it better to keep at a distance. I can't like a loud-voiced woman."

Mrs. Hunter was feeling particularly amiable. She had the pleasurable consciousness of having said exactly what she wanted, and in exactly the right words.

"Naughty man, to leave me all the talking to do!" she cried. "And that horrid little woman, Black, bores me so intensely. She sat here for at least an hour. She was wanting tea, I know, but I was determined not to give her any. Now, Mrs. Dacres I really think is rather nice. She talks loudly, certainly, and dresses oddly; but that's far better than Mrs. Black, with her village attempts at fashion. And Mrs. Dacres is so perfectly well-bred."

Colonel Hunter laughed. "I confess," he said, "that among the requirements of *my* perfectly well-bred lady, a low voice stands first. Why," glancing kindly at his wife, "that's what I admired, to begin with, in you."

"And nothing more afterwards?" she inquired, archly.

Colonel Hunter bent and kissed the smooth forehead, as the apparent, and perhaps the easiest answer.

"But what did you all find to chatter about for so long?" he presently asked. "Have any of the little Blacks got the measles, or are Mrs. Dacres' servants leaving?"

"What nonsense you talk!" laughed his wife. "Do you suppose that we ladies have nothing else to speak about but children and servants? Why, we discussed the weather, and the harvest prospects, and the fair, and a thousand other things—not to speak of the Grays," she added.

"The Grays?" The Colonel's face showed a sudden interest. "And what had you to say about the Grays?"

"Oh, I? Nothing, of course. Why, I know nothing of them. But the Dacres seem to have seen a good deal of them, and ——"

"Well, *she* didn't agree with your opinion of Mrs. Gray, I'm sure. But perhaps you were wise, and refrained from expressing any?"

"I don't know what you mean by 'agreeing with my opinion,' and my 'expressing any,'" said Mrs. Hunter, in a voice whose coldness contrasted sharply with her husband's warmth of tone. "Mrs. Dacres evidently thinks their whole appearance in the neighbourhood as strange as I do, and so would anybody of any judgment. You mark my words, Lionel. These Grays won't have been here a year before something very strange comes out about them. And then, perhaps, you'll be sorry you did not go by your wife's judgment, for once in your life."

Colonel Hunter was in no mood to be amused, as he might otherwise have been, by the semi-tragedy of the voice and words.

"It seems to me," he said crossly, "you women always manage to speak ill of each other. Why, only yesterday I met Dacres, and he was saying what a delightful woman Mrs. Gray was, and how much he and his wife both liked her. And to-day, I suppose, you all spent your time in picking her to pieces and abusing her."

"That's like you!" cried his wife, rising from her low chair and gathering up her hat and apron with an air of righteous indignation. "Just like you men—you're all the same! If only a woman has a pretty face and smiles upon you, the best and the wisest of you are all ready to fall at her feet and call her an angel! I have no patience with it. You and Mr. Dacres ought to know better. She is *not* a nice woman. I have told you so before, and I have my reasons for saying so. If you were not blinded by her looks—if she were old and ugly, instead of—of appearing young and charming, you would be both ready enough to agree with me. A man of your age and experience ought to know better."

Mrs. Hunter's voice trembled with anger. But by her last words and their tone her frightened husband was recalled to himself, and to the danger he ran of detection should he espouse the cause too warmly. He stood silent, somewhat sulky, reflecting on his powerlessness to defend Evelyn even by word. He waited defiantly, almost expecting a further torrent of his wife's accusations to burst upon him.

But Mrs. Hunter paused, looking at her husband irresolutely. She, for her part, was afraid that she had gone a little too far. The Colonel might be roused into demanding of her what the dark

facts were concerning Mrs. Gray, at which she had hinted. And that was what she could never divulge—never.

IV.

It was a hot day in August, and the day of the great garden-party that Mr. and Mrs. Dacres gave every summer to their friends; a day important enough to be ranked with the first hunt breakfast, or even with the Hunters' dinner-parties.

Following the last carriage through the Vicarage gate, we find ourselves on a wide green lawn, and in the company of the whole neighbourhood for ten miles around. Seldom seen squires and parsons, with blooming wives and daughters, and sons straight from the University, all were there. Some strolled about and admired the brilliant geraniums and lobellias in Mr. Dacres' flower-beds; some of the younger and more enthusiastic were already filling the tennis-courts; while some preferred the sweet shade of the rose-walk which led to the churchyard.

Colonel and Mrs. Hunter were of course among the guests, and had just shaken hands with their hostess. Mrs. Hunter stood glancing critically at the costumes that floated by, restful in the consciousness that none was likely to be comparable in beauty with Jeanne's last master-piece. A soft voice sounded in her ear:

"How do you do, Mrs. Hunter? Is it not terribly hot? Don't you think we might find a cooler place?"

Mrs. Hunter turned and faced Mrs. Gray, who, robed in a dress of softest Eastern silk, stood smiling rather timidly beside her.

It was a lovely face; there was no doubt at all about it. But what eyes could Mrs. Hunter have for anything but the dress, the unmistakable silk, with its strangely scrolled pattern, that fell so gracefully round Evelyn's slight figure? For one moment she paused voiceless, and turned rather pale. The sudden apparition had startled her. Then she answered suavely enough:

"Ah! Mrs. Gray! Yes, the sun is unbearable. Let us go to the rose-walk."

The two ladies turned and sauntered leisurely off together, to the great delight of Colonel Hunter, who stood near watching.

"How nice and cool the white dresses of those girls look," said the wily Mrs. Hunter, opening the conversation as they passed the tennis-ground; "how I wish that I could wear one still!"

"Yes," agreed Evelyn, "I always think young people look better in white than in anything else. I am almost sorry I did not wear it myself to-day; it is so very hot. But like you, I thought it juvenile for a married woman, at a stately party like this."

Mrs. Hunter was prompt to take advantage of her opportunity. "Oh, I am so glad you didn't," she said; "nothing could be more lovely than the dress you are wearing. Such a soft silk and such a wonderful blending of colours. I have never seen so beautiful a

thing in my life. Will you excuse me?—Is it a very rude question to ask?—But where can you have procured it?" and she turned with her sweetest smile to Mrs. Gray as she spoke.

The younger lady blushed deeply before she answered, and there was some hesitation in her voice:

"You will think it so strange," she said at last, "and I don't know how to explain. I cannot tell you where it came from, because I do not know. My aunt gave me the dress in my *trousseau*—but there was some mystery about it—she would not tell me where she got it from." And Evelyn looked straight at her questioner, the frankness of her eyes contradicting the embarrassment of her blushes.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Hunter, in her stiffest voice, and with an instant change of manner; "as you remark, it is certainly very strange." And making some slight excuse, she abruptly turned, leaving Mrs. Gray alone in the rose walk.

"Now," thought Evelyn, with a sigh, "I have somehow managed to offend her again; and she seemed inclined to be more friendly. How stupid of me! I wish Aunt Lucy had not made such a secret about nothing: why could she not tell me where it came from?" thoughtfully smoothing the soft folds. "She said she had had the silk by her for some time. Dear, mysterious old Aunt Lucy! Ah," looking up, "how do you do, Colonel Hunter! Your wife has just deserted me, so you have come to keep me from feeling lonely."

Colonel Hunter turned to walk with Evelyn. "You and my wife are getting quite friends," he said, gaily. "I saw you walking off together."

Evelyn smiled. "Indeed," she said, "I wish we were. For I like your wife much, and want her to like me. But I am afraid she does not care for me; and just now I seem so unfortunate as to have offended her."

"Offended her? You offended her? Oh, impossible!" cried the Colonel. "Tell me what it was all about?"

"Nothing very much. It was my own fault, and I am so sorry for it. Mrs. Hunter kindly admired my dress, and asked me where I got it from, and she did not seem pleased that I could not tell her."

The Colonel staggered in his walk. He tried to realise the situation. His wife knew all then—and had known, he could not tell how long. What vague suspicions and ideas might she not be harbouring of him? He knew her tendency to be jealous. Controlling himself, he asked, with apparent indifference, the answer that Mrs. Gray had given.

"That is the unlucky part," she replied; "I could not give her any answer, for I do not myself know where Aunt Lucy got this dress from. And that is what seemed to offend Mrs. Hunter. Indeed," flushing slightly, "she almost seemed to doubt my word."

Gazing into her innocent face, the Colonel could never have doubted Evelyn's truthfulness; and it was impossible for him, at that

moment, to reveal himself to his fair companion as the giver of the dress she wore. He saw how it was—that Mrs. Miles had never mentioned to her his connection with it. Presently they returned to the other visitors on the lawn, and mixing among their friends, soon got separated.

Colonel Hunter found himself standing beside his wife, who was delicately sipping claret-cup under a spreading tree. He examined her countenance carefully, to see if it bore the marks which he expected to find, and flew to procure for her a more comfortable chair, and a mat for her feet.

Mrs. Hunter, assured by these signs of devotion that her lord was still quite unsuspecting of the use she had made of his present to her of the beautiful silk, was in her turn particularly gracious; and the Colonel felt fairly puzzled.

V.

MRS. SPENCE, the lawyer's wife, was "at home" every Wednesday afternoon. But that she was not expecting visitors on this particular Wednesday afternoon was apparent from the haste with which she hurried a basket of socks under the sofa as the front-door bell sounded loudly through the house. For the rain was coming down.

There was much aggravating scuffling and laying aside of umbrellas in the passage before the maid finally opened the door, and announced "Mrs. Dacres and Mrs. Black."

In her confusion at this double influx, Mrs. Spence had scarcely presence of mind to give the organised signal for "tea" to her servant. But Sarah rose to the occasion, and the visitors had not been seated ten minutes before a tray was brought in laden with Mrs. Spence's best china, and followed by an array of cakes.

As was natural, the conversation soon turned to the subject of Mrs. Dacres' garden-party of a week ago, and both Mrs. Spence and Mrs. Black were voluble in their congratulations on the success of the entertainment.

"Yes," said the Vicar's wife, in her clear tones, and with some pardonable pride, "considering how many people we had, I think the time passed off very well. There was not one contretemps."

"Or scarcely one," interrupted Mrs. Black, who seemed to be marking with absorbed interest the flight of the heavy clouds over the leaden sky. "I suppose you would not exactly count Mrs. Hunter's quarrel with Mrs. Gray as a contretemps."

The other two ladies stared at the Doctor's wife in amazement, and Mrs. Dacres spoke.

"Indeed you are quite mistaken," she said, rather sharply. "Far from Mrs. Hunter having quarrelled with Mrs. Gray—a thing I cannot imagine her doing with anyone—I am glad to say that at our party they seemed to get quite good friends, and went to sit in the rose-walk together."

"Yes, indeed," followed up Mrs. Spence, seconding the Vicar's wife against Mrs. Black; "I saw them myself."

Thus attacked, Mrs. Black turned on Mrs. Dacres. "Oh, I saw them go off there, too!" she said, nodding wisely her head, with its canopy of flowers and ribbons. "But I happened to be walking there myself a few minutes later, and I saw Mrs. Hunter turn suddenly, with that particular air of queen she sometimes puts on, and leave Mrs. Gray standing alone, evidently frightened out of her wits, poor young lady!"

"You don't mean it!" cried Mrs. Spence. "Now, I do call that unkind! I can't, for the life of me, think why Mrs. Hunter doesn't like Mrs. Gray. I'm sure she can never have done anything to vex her, and I like her so very much."

"Oh, you see," said Mrs. Dacres, standing up for the absent lady, "Mrs. Hunter has, of course, to be more careful than we have as to whom she calls upon and knows intimately. She owes that to the memory of Lady Hastings."

"Owes that to the memory of Lady Fiddlesticks!" cried Mrs. Black, forgetting in her excitement all manners, and becoming alarmingly natural. "I don't believe a word of that grand friendship with Lady Hastings. It's just an excuse for her intolerable airs, nothing else. How are we to know that she has ever even seen Lady Hastings? Where," turning almost fiercely on Mrs. Spence, "where's her proof of it?"

"Oh, that's very true," hastily agreed the lawyer's lady. "Of course we can't tell. She doesn't seem to have any proof."

"Oh, but that's rubbish!" interrupted Mrs. Dacres, decidedly. "Of course she knew Lady Hastings and her son; knew them well, too. Why, I've often heard her describe young Sir James."

"Have you?" said Mrs. Black, with burning sarcasm. "I believe I've had that privilege, too. But just you wait till Sir James comes home, and see."

"Well," said Mrs. Spence, with a mild attempt at bringing the conversation back to more peaceable subjects. "All that has nothing to do with pretty Mrs. Gray."

"Yes it has," cried Mrs. Black, not to be silenced now that she had the opportunity of venting some of her long-suppressed ill-feeling towards Mrs. Hunter. "It has everything to do with Mrs. Gray! And I say that it's an abominable shame a stuck-up woman like that should tease and persecute a pretty, nice young thing—and for such a reason, too!"

At this point Mrs. Dacres, who made it a principle never to listen to any village gossip, rose to take her leave. Mrs. Spence almost hurried her from the house, and then drew her chair nearer to Mrs. Black's.

"Dear me!" she said, her whole face bright with the expectation of news. "Now, what motive can she have for behaving so to poor Mrs. Gray?"

"Why, don't you know?" returned Mrs. Black. "Of course the reason's plain enough. Colonel Hunter knew Mrs. Gray before he was married, and his wife's as jealous as she can hold together."

"Dear, dear, dear! To think of it!" ejaculated the lawyer's wife. "That's the reason, is it? Well, I never! Do you know I always thought it was because the Grays are nobodies—and Mrs. Hunter's so very proud. Not that I'm so sure that they are no ——" Mrs. Spence checked herself abruptly, and writhed under Mrs. Black's formidable eye.

"What were you going to say?" she enquired. "You weren't sure of what?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing!" stammered the frightened lady. "I—I really don't know what I was going to say."

"You were saying that you weren't sure the Grays were nobodies, I think," pursued her tormentor, never for one moment removing the fascination of her terrible eye. "Now what makes you think that?"

"Oh, I don't know! nothing at all!" hesitated Mrs. Spence, vainly trying to get beyond the reach of that fixed gaze. "Only my husband—but indeed it's nothing!"

"Now, you know this is quite ridiculous," said Mrs. Black sternly. "Why do you make such a fuss about nothing? What does your husband think?"

Poor Mrs. Spence held out for a little longer. Then the heads of the two ladies drew gradually nearer and nearer together. And when Mrs. Black at last left the house it was with a new and mysterious expression on her face.

Meeting Mrs. Gray in the village, she stopped and surprised her by quite a flow of friendliness. This was unusual; for hitherto, whatever opinion she might express of Mrs. Hunter in private, she had implicitly followed that lady's lead in society, including even her cool treatment of the Grays.

VI.

It was the evening of the first and grandest of the series of dinner-parties that Colonel and Mrs. Hunter gave every winter.

Mrs. Hunter, beautifully dressed, her piles of fair hair arranged to perfection, sat awaiting her guests, impatiently balancing a beaded and embroidered slipper on the point of her narrow foot. Colonel Hunter, giving a finishing touch to his tie at the mirror in the drawing-room, addressed his wife over his shoulder.

"And who am I to take in, my dear?"

"Oh! you'll take in Mrs. Dalrymple, of course. She's a baronet's daughter, and the only one among the lot with a vestige of a title. I suppose I must have that odious old bookworm, Dr. Grubbs, who can talk of nothing but the origin of things, or some such folly. Such a pity the Winters couldn't come. I've had to ask the Blacks at the last moment to fill up their place."

"Let me see. We've the Dalrymples, and the Maitlands, and the Dacres, and the Grays ——"

"The Grays? Certainly not. You don't suppose I was going to ask them, do you?"

"My dear! It's impossible you can have been so rude as to leave them out!"

"Indeed I have. I have done it with full consideration. I am determined to show the neighbourhood clearly that I, for my part, will give no countenance to ——"

Mrs. Hunter was cut short in her somewhat excited explanation by the arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Maitland; and the other guests soon assembled.

Then followed the lengthy dinner, which it was Mrs. Hunter's pride to plan, and the pleasure of her guests to devour. Course succeeded course in duly prescribed order; delicious wines, hot-house fruits and rare flowers delighted the senses. Colonel Hunter, happy and hospitable, beamed upon his friends, and led the conversation at his end of the table. Mrs. Hunter also did her part well by looking handsome, and listening patiently to Dr. Grubbs' careful explanation of the origin and development of the art of cooking.

Dinner was over at last. Mrs. Dalrymple had caught Mrs. Hunter's eye, the fear of missing which signal had completely marred her enjoyment of the pine-apple, and the ladies had retired to the drawing-room, with its consoling compensations of coffee and gossip. As seems customary, they all gathered round the fire-place, for though it was still early in October the evening was chilly, and a bright fire blazed on the hearth.

The slight pause, caused by the internal criticism passed by each lady upon the rest, after the first sip of coffee, was broken by Mrs. Black, who was splendidly attired in crimson satin.

"I am surprised not to meet the Grays here to-night, Mrs. Hunter," she said. "Couldn't they come?"

"I really don't know," responded her hostess languidly, glad that her words should be clearly heard by all present, "for I did not ask them."

There was a slight murmur among the ladies, which Mrs. Hunter took for approval. Then Mrs. Black spoke again.

"Not ask them? How very strange! And I suppose people are speaking and thinking of nothing else!"

But Mrs. Hunter did not gather the full drift of Mrs. Black's remarks. She only thought that the Doctor's wife was angry at being invited so unmistakably at the last moment to "fill up," and was in consequence trying to make herself disagreeable. She answered with the same air of well-bred indifference, and without raising her eyes:

"You see I don't care to have people for my guests who, as you say, are the talk of the whole neighbourhood. I have always held that a lady should never be talked about."

A hum of confused voices rose, whispered half-sentences, and Mrs. Black's above the rest, saying: "Dear me! I thought she was so very intimate with the Hastings family!" Mrs. Hunter, with a horrible presentiment of coming evil, looked up and round for explanation. Mrs. Dacres touched her arm.

"But what does it all mean?" she inquired. "What are they all talking of? And what has Sir James Hastings to do with the Grays?"

"Come," said Mrs. Dacres, drawing her hostess into the quaintly adorned recess close by, "and I will explain it all to you."

When there the Vicar's wife began hurriedly: "You do not know? How very strange! Everybody has heard. It seems—indeed, you will scarcely believe it—that these Grays, whom we all like so much, are not really Grays at all, but young Sir James Hastings and his wife. They were married just before they came down here, and then, by way of finding out what the people about are like, and all that kind of thing, they took the name of Gray, and went into the Cottage. Of course, the whole affair was more of a joke than anything else. But you see we were completely taken in—even you," with a doubtful look at her listener, "who used to know Sir James so well. I believe it was Mr. Spence who first began to suspect something of who they really were, and he told his wife, and she went and told Mrs. Black, and then, of course, it wasn't a secret for very long. Sir James was laughing with us about it to-day."

Mrs. Hunter sat white and rigid, as though she had been turned into stone, while Mrs. Dacres spoke. From the first moment that the disclosure was begun she had seen the whole thing, its undeniable truth, its shattering consequences. With a smile, which from its ghastliness positively alarmed the Vicar's wife, she rose from the sofa and returned to her guests.

The stream of talk flowed on, soon swelled by the gentlemen, and, as was natural, the chief topic of conversation was the return of Sir James and his young bride. Mrs. Hunter carefully avoided her husband's eye, though she could not but hear every word of the accounts he had to give of his former acquaintance with Lady Hastings as Miss Miles.

She went through the evening as in a dream. Nothing but the extraordinary force of her will kept her from bursting into violent hysterics. She thought her visitors would never take their leave, and when, after what seemed to her a life-time of agony, the last carriage rolled away and her husband returned from seeing it off, he found her lying back on a sofa, with her handkerchief pressed to her eyes.

Colonel Hunter was far too generous to take any advantage of his wife's discomfiture: besides which, the fact of Mrs. Gray having suddenly become Lady Hastings in no wise altered any of the circumstances of his former gift of the silk.

"Never mind, dear," he said kindly, bending over her; "it

doesn't matter in the least. I am sure Mrs. Gr—, Lady Hastings, I mean, is anxious to be friends with you."

"Friends!" screamed his wife tearfully, starting up and dashing the handkerchief from her eyes. "I will never be friends with that woman, though she be Lady Hastings a thousand times over. Friends with a woman who gets her clothes from a pawnbroker!"

"From a *what*?" cried Colonel Hunter, wondering if the events of the evening had not proved too much for his wife's brain.

"Yes," reiterated Mrs. Hunter; "gets her clothes from a pawnbroker! Since you will have it so, I must tell you all, I suppose. I know for a certain fact that that is what your fine Lady Hastings does. Yes, and you shall hear my proof, whatever it may cost me!"

"Well?" cried he, gazing at her.

"Do you remember a roll of peculiar patterned Eastern silk that you gave me some time ago? I was very hard up, and had no use for it—and—and—Frilling sold it for me to Jacobs, the pawnbroker. I dare say it was very wrong—but I had to pay a bill, and didn't know where on earth to turn for the money. I didn't like to come to you, Lionel; I was afraid you would think me so dreadfully extravagant. Well, Mrs. Gray—or Lady Hastings as she now calls herself—had had the face to appear in a dress made of the very silk. It was impossible to mistake it. I recognised it in a moment; there never was another pattern like it. Nevertheless, for I could scarcely believe a woman professing to be a lady would do such a thing, I asked Mrs. Gray herself where she got the silk. And she would give me no answer. She said there was a mystery connected with the dress (I knew that already), and she could not say where it came from. What do you think now?"

"My dear Harriet," he said at last, "I must say you have acted very foolishly and very wrongly throughout. Leaving alone the question of the use you made of that beautiful silk, my present, I cannot but think that a lady who *pawns* things has no business to find fault with another because she *buys* them. However, as it so happens, Lady Hastings did not procure her dress from the pawnbroker. In the old days, I myself gave Mrs. Miles the silk which you have seen Lady Hastings wearing, and her aunt gave it to her in her trousseau; the other half of the silk I gave to you. Now, my dear, you may think what you like of my part in this transaction, so long as you leave me at liberty to think what I like of yours."

Neither Colonel nor Mrs. Hunter ever again referred to the incident of the pawned gown. After her dinner-party Mrs. Hunter was extremely unwell, and she and her husband went for a short tour on the Continent. When they returned to Swire Old House, Sir James and Lady Hastings had moved into the Manor, and the two families are now on the friendliest terms possible.

THEIR GOLDEN WEDDING.

WITH heart to bear and brain to win,
 What matter fortune tarried?
 Faith, hope, and love are strong in youth—
 And so they married.

Nor did they once regret the step,
 Despite of cares and troubles;
 And that ere long youth's gilded hopes
 Proved rainbow bubbles.

For still they loved, and love has faith
 To pilot roughest weather;
 And so they braved the sea of life—
 And rowed together.

And by-and-by the sun broke forth,
 Showing them peaceful haven,
 In which to rest and seek the joys
 They long had craven.

And so, although a chequered Spring,
 Summer gave goodly measure,
 While Autumn falling did but bring
 Still richer treasure.

And when the frosts of Winter came,
 Their locks with silver threading,
 They called their dear ones round to keep
 Their golden wedding.

But on the morning of that day
 When grandchildren came peeping
 To bid them hasten to the feast—
 Lo! both were sleeping.

God loved and pitied them, and so
 Their wave-worn bark He tided:
 That they in death, as they in life,
 Were not divided.

